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Digital media and democratization

The case of Myanmar

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ABSTRACT

This research project aims at exploring the role and potential of digital media in the current democratization process in Myanmar. Understanding democratization as a process of social change that implies empowering civil society and ensuring equality, the question is how digital media contribute to building a participatory democracy in Myanmar after a five decades long military regime. The fast chain of events that led to the recent gradual opening of Myanmar raises doubts and expectations colliding with the vibrant reality of the country.

In order to analyse the role of digital media within such a fast-changing scenario, this research intends to answer the following questions:

- a) How do digital media portray Myanmar? This question will be analysed in relation to the media discourse of the official visit paid by Myanmar's President Thein Sein to US President Barack Obama in Washington on 20 May 2013.
- b) How do stakeholders in Myanmar use digital media for democratization? To what extent can digital media become a tool for democratization within a very limited connectivity context? What challenges may the digital media imply in the democratization of Myanmar? Semi-structured interviews with stakeholders were conducted in Yangon to gather up-to-date and first-hand insights.

The combination of two qualitative research methods, discourse analysis and semi-structured qualitative interviews, aims at building a deeper understanding of the role and potential of digital media in Myanmar.

This research pays attention to specificities of Myanmar's cultural, political and economic context, with a focus on technology and Internet. Field research showed the importance of taking into account the role of social media. A brief theoretical discussion of key concepts such as 'digital media', 'social change' and 'democratization' is provided to build a solid basis for analysis.

KEY WORDS

Digital Media, Democratization, Myanmar, Facebook, Social Change

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1 INTRODUCTION

“The digital revolution is perhaps the closest we can come to a permanent revolution” (Hemer & Tufte, 2012, p.232)

1.1 AIM, OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Myanmar is in the centre of attention of foreign investment and development agencies. Since its gradual opening after the 2010 elections¹, the country is attracting direct foreign investment² while taking steps towards democratization³. Elections in 2015 are expected to be a landmark. Years of limited communications under military censorship are giving way to new media outlets, a loosening of restrictions on existing newsmakers and an increasing social media activity, mainly on Facebook. With less than 10 per cent of the population being currently connected to mobile phones⁴, international telecommunication companies long for Myanmar. In the words of *The Economist* (A Burmese Spring, 2013), “private companies are jostling to capture a share of an almost virginal consumer market of some 60 million people” in Myanmar. The Government plans to increase the mobile phone penetration from 1 percent in December 2012⁵ to 80 percent in 2016 (Macaraig, 2013).

The aim of this research is to explore if and how digital media boost democratization and social change in Myanmar. It is increasingly difficult to ignore the impact of digital media within networked societies. But what is their potential in a country with low Internet penetration rates like Myanmar? Can digital media help build new organisational frames for the society? How do ‘symbolic elites’ (Van Dijk, 2010) of social change use digital media? Communication is a tool for social change; hence, digital media should play a role in a process of democratization that occurs in a complex context, within an accelerated pace of reforms and under a strong surveillance of the international political and economic key players. Notions of digital media, social change and democratization will underpin the conceptual frame of this analysis.

¹ UNDP (2012). *The Global Conversation in Myanmar*. Retrieved 1 May 2013 from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L-VZFcM-Y8I&list=UUagCOAfZBpsTOIAJq_vcWbw&index=64

² World Bank (2013). *Myanmar Economic Monitor*. Retrieved 1 March 2014 from http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/EAP/Myanmar/Myanmar_Economic_Monitor_October_2013.pdf

³ Myanmar rumbo a cambio democrático; Ashton nombra representante europeo en el país. (2013, 31 May). *Argentinaon.com*. Retrieved 1 June 2013 from <http://argentinaon.com/noticias/internacional/1801-myanmar-rumbo-a-cambio-democratico-ashton-nombra-representante-europeo-en-el-pais.html>

⁴ Open Technology Fund. A Radio Free Asia Program (2013). *Internet Access and Openness: Myanmar 2012*. Retrieved 10 November 2013 from https://www.opentechfund.org/files/reports/otf_myanmar_access_openness_public.pdf

⁵ Internet World Stats (2012). Retrieved 1 March 2014 from <http://www.Internetworkworldstats.com/stats3.htm>

Taking into account the cultural, economic and technological context in which digital media are used in Myanmar, the following research question will guide this study: What is the role and potential of digital media in the process of democratization in Myanmar? In order to answer this question, the study will analyse

- a. how digital media phrase Myanmar beyond the country's own media confines;
- b. how stakeholders in Myanmar use digital media for democratization;
- c. to what extent digital media can become a tool for democratization within a very limited connectivity context;
- d. the challenges of using digital media for democratization purposes in Myanmar.

The study combines two research methods:

- a) a discourse analysis of selected digital media features phrasing Myanmar, and
- b) qualitative semi-structured interviews with local members of the symbolic elites about usage of digital media.

Relevant conclusions for communication for development practices will be drawn from the results of both methods⁶.

1.2 RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

Wings of change are blowing in Myanmar, a country that was ruled by the military junta for more than 50 years. President Thein Sein, a former general, is leading the way towards democratization.

Strategically located between India, China and Thailand, with a population of 60 million, Myanmar is attracting development agencies, international policy-makers and private investment. Despite ongoing ethnic conflict (ethnic minorities account for 40 percent of Myanmar's population), and the long-lasting fight between government troops and the armed militia based in the North⁷, Myanmar holds the charm of a 'sleeping beauty'. The boom of companies and agencies that want to drive, advise or influence democratization has drawn plenty of attention on the country⁸.

National and international media are phrasing Myanmar along this process. After years of limitations on the circulation of information, in the 2014 World Press Freedom Index Myanmar reached its best-ever rank, climbing six ranks up to the 145th out of 180

⁶ Waisbord, S. (2005). Five key ideas: coincidence and challenges in development communication. In O. Hemer & T. Tufte (Eds.). *Media and Glocal Change. Rethinking Communication for Development* (pp. 77-90). Buenos Aires/Göteborg: CLACSO/Nordicom.

⁷ A Burmese Spring. (2013, 25 May). *Economist.com*. Retrieved 25 May 2013 from <http://www.economist.com/news/special-report/21578168-after-50-years-brutal-military-rule-myanmars-democratic-opening-has-been-swift-and>

⁸ Clinton meets Myanmar leader after sanctions eased. (2012, 14 July). *Timesofmalta.com*. Retrieved 2 April 2013 from <http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20120714/world/Clinton-meets-Myanmar-leader-after-sanctions-easEd.428481>

analysed countries⁹. Digital media are challenging the traditional communication landscapes, in Myanmar as well as on a global scale¹⁰. Still, concerns are voiced about censorship and human rights violations. Human Rights Watch appeals for protecting Myanmar's Internet and mobile phone users¹¹. At the same time, grassroots activists mobilize the population e.g. at the Myanmar Internet Freedom Forum¹² to enhance freedom of speech and address digital illiteracy with capacity building.

ICTs (information and communication technologies) are of great interest to Myanmar's policy makers nowadays. President Thein Sein pointed out that mobile phone connectivity would be a cornerstone of his policy¹³. The cost for accessing mobile devices (SIM cards are still expensive in Myanmar¹⁴) is decreasing, as the government has recently granted nationwide licenses to the Norwegian and Qatari telecommunications providers Telenor and Ooredoo.

1.3 MAIN LIMITATIONS

The fast pace of transformations in Myanmar hampers the assessment of mid and long-term consequences. Crucial transitions in several areas of human development happen simultaneously with little predictability. Economic, political and technological changes are perceived with both high hopes and deep-rooted scepticism after 50 years of military rule. The uncertainty of the ongoing change process also affects the findings of this

⁹ Reporters Without Borders for Freedom of Information (2014). *2014 World Press Freedom Index*. Retrieved 6 April 2014 from <https://rsf.org/index2014/en-asia.php>

¹⁰ See e.g. Chang Rodriguez, M. (2013, 3 April). *Building a Technology Future in Burma/Myanmar. In Asia*. Retrieved 6 April 62013 from <http://asiafoundation.org/in-asia/2013/04/03/building-a-technology-future-in-burmamyanmar>; Petulla, S. (2013, 22 March). In Burma, newspapers are going daily, but the transformation to watch may be in mobile. *Nieman Journalism Lab*. Retrieved 2 April 2013 from <http://www.niemanlab.org/2013/03/in-burma-newspapers-are-going-daily-but-the-transformation-to-watch-may-be-in-mobile/>; Muminova, O. (2013, 15 May). Mobile-enhanced economy and the end of a recession. *The Guardian*. Retrieved 16 May 2013 from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/advertising/digital-media-trends-mobile-economy>

¹¹ Reforming Telecommunications in Burma. Human Rights and Responsible Investment in Mobile and the Internet. (2013). *Human Rights Watch*. Retrieved 25 May 2013 from <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2013/05/19/reforming-telecommunications-burma>

¹² See e.g. Freedom House: Myanmar Internet Freedom Forum. (2013, 3 June). *YouTube, Freedom House channel*. Retrieved 10 January 2014 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ez6quO9tQ9I>; Freedom House Grantee Holds First-Ever Internet Freedom Forum in Burma. (2013, 3 June). *Freedomhouse.org*. Retrieved 10 January 2014 from <http://www.freedomhouse.org/article/freedom-house-grantee-holds-first-ever-internet-freedom-forum-burma>; Myanmar ICT for Development Organisation (MIDO). Facebook page. Available at <https://www.facebook.com/Myanmarido>

¹³ Wagstaff, J. & Reuters (2013, 20 January). Mobile revolution in Myanmar is on the cards, but too slow for many. *Chicago Tribune*. Retrieved 2 April 2013 from http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2013-01-20/news/sns-rt-us-myanmar-telecombsbre90k01y-20130120_1_mobile-penetration-mobile-telephony-mobile-revolution

¹⁴ Petulla, S. (2013, 14 March). This SIM card used to cost \$3.000. Democracy may bring it down to zero. *Quartz*. Retrieved 16 April 2013 from <http://qz.com/62523/this-sim-card-used-to-cost-3000-democracy-may-bring-it-down-to-zero/>

research, which may consolidate over time or prove outdated in case of a substantial change of direction of the current political opening.

Due to the ongoing transition of the country, scarce academic research on the topic has been published yet, while the existing one – published very recently – is therefore subject to the same risk of fugacity as the present study.

Another limitation of this study concerns language and culture. The researcher does not understand Myanmar language, which is a handicap for getting a sound understanding of the local media landscape, analysing discourses and conducting interviews. However, an extended stay in the country allowed the author of this study to familiarize with the context and to become more aware of the differences in cultural and political codes and aprioristic assumptions.

Related to the language problem, browsing Internet content with an original Myanmar language font is difficult. This issue is not limited to foreigners unable to read Myanmar language, but also to Myanmar nationals themselves, as the lack of standardization has resulted in the co-existence of two different fonts, ZawgyiOne and Myanmar3, which causes difficulties to retrieve content properly.

2 MYANMAR AND SOCIAL CHANGE: RECENT LANDMARKS

Few countries have gone through a similarly significant political and socio-economic change as Myanmar during the last decade. Yangon, the country's ex-capital and socio-economic metropolis, demonstrates this fast transformation at every street corner. While its main avenues are crowded by traffic and lined by modern sky scrapers, construction sites and mobile phone shops, side streets reveal a different face of the city: communities living in bamboo huts without electricity, proper sanitation and deprived of access to health care, education and information.

In UNDP's latest Human Development Report's (2013)¹⁵ country index, Myanmar ranked 149th out of 187 countries and was categorized as a least developed country. 26 percent of the population live in poverty, most of them in rural areas. The socioeconomic gap goes hand in hand with the digital divide in the country. Given the lack of telecommunication infrastructure and the immense costs of broadband Internet access and mobile phone SIM cards, the use of digital media among the population is still limited. Nevertheless, digital media played a significant role in the uprisings in the recent past, as they were used for networking and dissemination of texts, images and videos locally and abroad.

The following brief historical abstract intends to create a better understanding of the current political and socioeconomic situation in Myanmar.

Soon after reaching independence from a century of British colonial rule in 1948, Burma suffered from civil unrest and ethnic conflicts, following the assassination of several leaders of the national unification process, including General Aung Sang (uncle of Aung San Suu Kyi, Nobel Peace Prize winner and current leader of the main opposition party National League for Democracy, NLD). A democratically elected government struggled to unite the 135 ethnic groups present in the country and proved unable to prevent armed conflict with independentist forces. Political instability and an increasing role of the armed forces culminated in a 'coup d'état' in 1962, when General Ne Win established a socialist state under military control that lasted for almost 50 years. Among other measures, the military junta controlled access of information by taking over all newspapers, restricting the import of international media and strictly censoring content through the Printers and Publishers Registration from 1962 and Television and Video Law from 1985. The lack of freedom, repression of political opponents, as well as economic and social discontent of large parts of the population led to several uprisings against the military government, the most significant ones in 1988 and 2007.

In 1988, students' protests against the economic crisis and mismanagement led to a brutal response from the military. Martial law was decreed after the killing of 3,000 students

¹⁵ UNDP (2013). *Human Development Report 2013. The Rise of the South: Human Progress in a Diverse World.* Retrieved 15 May 2014 from http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/14/hdr2013_en_complete.pdf

and activists on 8 August 1988¹⁶, known as ‘the 8888 Uprising’. Brutal repression was followed by a wimpy reform programme, including a change of the country’s name from Burma to Myanmar. The first multi-party elections since 1960 in May 1990 were won by the opposition party National League for Democracy, led by U Tin U and Aung San Suu Kyi. However, the military government refused to recognize the outcome and Aung San Suu Kyi remained in house arrest, under which she was placed in July 1989. When she was awarded the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought in 1990 and the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991, Myanmar got into the spotlight of international attention. The opposition movement gained outreach through exiled members who would use radio stations and online resources to raise international awareness of the situation in the country.

In 2007, a series of protests against sky-rocketing fuel prices escalated into the ‘Saffron Revolution’, named after the colour of the robes of the monks who joined the demonstrations. The protests increased for several weeks, culminating in August and September 2007 when more than 100,000 demonstrators gathered in Yangon. The demonstrations were violently repressed, leaving several casualties, hundreds of monks detained and Internet access blocked (Chowdhury, 2008, p.6). Access to Internet, which had been introduced in Myanmar only in 1999/2000 (Aung, 2014, [annex 8.4](#)), remained censored and under strict surveillance for almost four years. According to Chowdhury (2008), “much of the cyber activism surrounding democracy in Burma has originated outside the country with links to locally-based activists” (p.9). In this way, technology-savvy bloggers and exiled digital media like the *Democratic Voice of Burma* (DVB) and *Mizzima* maintained anti-governmental activity, with extensive email dissemination of pictures captured with mobile devices (Aung, 2014, [annex 8.4](#) & Goddard, 2014, [annex 8.3.3](#))¹⁷.

When the Internet ban ceased in 2011, Myanmar’s blogosphere adopted Facebook as the new tool to network, communicate and raise awareness (Aung, 2014, [annex 8.4](#)). On 20 August 2012, 48 years of media censorship officially ended and exile media were encouraged to return to Myanmar.¹⁸ The lifting of censorship triggered the blossoming of several national newspapers, despite remaining ambiguities in media and telecommunication laws that compromise legal protection:

¹⁶ Burma’s 1988 Protests (2007, 25 September). *BBC News Asia-Pacific*. Retrieved 9 May 2014 from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/7012158.stm>

¹⁷ The collaboration between local activists and exile or international media to circumvent national censorship and media repression is also a result of digital media’s networking and interaction capacity, as Breuer (2012, p.26) demonstrates with reference to the Tunisian revolution. Breuer, A. (2012). *The Role of Social Media in Mobilizing Political Protest. Evidence from the Tunisian Revolution*. Bonn: German Development Institute. Retrieved 15 January 2014 http://www.die-gdi.de/uploads/media/DP_10.2012.pdf

¹⁸ Burma abolishes media censorship (2012, 20 August). *BBC News Asia*. Retrieved 10 November 2013 from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-19315806>

“While government control and legal restrictions remain in place for domestic internet service providers, the government has recently begun to open up access to previously censored online content”¹⁹.

Since 2012, Myanmar has tried to catch up in terms of media development, freedom and diversity. However, the boom of private newspapers already seems to slow down, mostly due to newsmakers’ financial constraints. As in other countries, the trend goes towards digitalization in order to save printing costs and allow for mobile access of information, although connectivity remains a significant challenge.

Less than two years after the end of the military rule, Myanmar’s Deputy Minister of Information Ye Htut has gained himself the nickname ‘Facebook Minister’ thanks to his remarkable social media activity. Despite the apparent change in the public information policy, the population remains sceptical about the government’s public information and tolerance of opposition. According to the latest report of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar (2014),

“journalists described the prevailing climate of uncertainty, intimidation and fear of arrest, particularly if reporting dealt with issues too close to the interests of the military or other powerful elites” (p.5)²⁰.

Among other human rights violations, the report cites several cases of recent arrests of journalists for reporting on politically sensitive issues (ibd.), including the growing ethnic conflict between Buddhists and Muslims in Rakhine State.



Image 1. Newspapers sold on the streets of Yangon, February 2014 / Santi Mayor Farguell

¹⁹ Freedom of the Press 2013. Burma. (2013). *Freedomhouse.org*. Retrieved 10 April 2014 from <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2013/burma#.U4IiIPmSz4s>

²⁰ OHCHR (2014). *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Tomás Ojea Quintana* (A/HRC/25/64). Retrieved 5 April 2014 from http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session25/Documents/A-HRC-25-64_en.doc

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND EXISTING RESEARCH

Democratic media activism, social movements and ICTs for development have been extensively studied in Anglo-American liberal democracies, as counterforces to political and economic systems guided by corporate interests and highly commercialized mass media organizations (Couldry & Curran, 2003). In developing countries, the role of new media has been recently studied, particularly after the uprising of the ‘Arab Spring’ and the role social media played in it (Adi, 2014). While scholars and policy-makers’ views of new technologies for social change vary from optimistic (Thierer, 2010) to critic (Ebo, 2001; Hassan, 2004), there is a large agreement on considering the Internet and the network societies it constitutes (Castells, 1996) an important ground for development studies.

This research takes into account the role of the context and the patterns of new technological features within a climate of accelerated social change. Context is understood as the political, economic, cultural and technological configuration, and how it is entwined. The relevance of technological patterns of ICTs for social change has been largely discussed (Servon, 2002; Mehra, Merkel & Bishop, 2004; Uimonen, 2001), with a focus on concepts like the ‘technological determinism’ (Smith & Marx, 1994) and the ‘digital divide’ – “a metaphor for the uneven global distribution of new technologies, conceived as a major obstacle for the progress of societies regarded as less developed” (Granqvist, 2005, p.286). In a country with still very limited Internet penetration like Myanmar implementation of digital media is yet at an early stage. Myanmar therefore represents an interesting setting to study whether Internet can trigger, accompany, stimulate or facilitate social change when widespread access is severely limited.

More than five decades of lack of democratic experience and marginal public debate in Myanmar adds another layer of singularity to the case study. In order to approach this particularity in the most organic way, this research chose to use as a theoretical reference the definition of new media by Lievrouw (2011), which recognizes the crucial role of context and “institutional arrangements” (p.15) in assessing the usage of media technologies and their role in social change:

“New media can be defined as the combination of material artifacts, people’s practices, and the social and organizational arrangements involved in the process of human communication (...) they are continuously ‘recombinant’ and complexly and dynamically ‘networked’; in terms of their social consequences, people now take new media for granted as being pervasively ‘uniquitous’ and ‘interactive’ (with interactivity being a necessary condition for social, political, and cultural participation)” (ibd.).

According to Waisword (2005, p.78), centrality of power and the integration of top-down and bottom-up approaches are key ideas for a communication for development approach. Applied to this case study, this means on the one hand the power to control technological artifacts and to design normative frames (powers mostly in the hands of the Government),

and on the other hand the integration of bottom-up approaches from the grassroots of digital media activism.

As part of new media, ‘digital media’ are in the centre of this case study. In the following, this research aims to explore the connections between digital media, social change and democratization during the current political and socio-economical opening in Myanmar.

3.1 THE POTENTIAL OF DIGITAL MEDIA FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

3.1.1 Digital media

In cultural studies new media is a widely used concept to refer to the reframing of the communication paradigm triggered by the emergence of Internet and digital communications (Couldry, 2012). This research chose to use the term digital media in order to address a wider scope of media, including print outlets with an online presence.

The few established definitions of digital media stress or the technology or the user-bounded aspect. The relative newness of the phenomenon led to interpretations that are outdated now. As an example, a definition of digital media from the University of Guelph (2006) stressed its technological constituency as a “computer readable format”, highlighting the “facility to copy” and its ubiquity, but made no reference to the user experience and even suggested its increasing popularity might be a “hype”.

By contrast, another definition from the early stages of digital media (2003) put the emphasis on the user experience: “Media become ‘Digital Media’ when they offer a user experience that cannot be realised with other technologies”²¹. A complementary explanation stressed that in digital media the content was not more relevant than the use users make of it, which is a core aspect of communication for development.

In 2011, Miller (2011, p.15) argued that digital media as opposed to broadcast media tend to be networked via Internet and mobile devices. He supported Poster’s (1995) views about digital media’s “decentralised network architecture” which enables a constant dialogue between users “as opposed to a more pyramidal model of broadcast media”. Interactivity among users is a breakthrough compared to traditional broadcast media where the flow of content remains in the hands of the editor.

The most relevant definition of digital media for the conceptual needs of this research is the one presented by Couldry (2012). According to the author,

“digital media comprise merely the latest phase of media’s contribution to modernity, but the most complex of all, a complexity illustrated by the nature of

²¹ Definition of Digital Media. (2003). *The Digital Media Manifesto*. Retrieved 12 February 2014 from <http://www.chiariglione.org/oldfiles/manifesto/definition.htm>

the internet as a network of networks that connects all types of communication from one-to-one to many-to-many into a wider ‘space’ of communication” (p.2).

Technical specifications aside, Couldry stresses on the one hand Castells’ (2002) key concept ‘network of networks’ and on the other hand the amplified space of communication in which new ways of communication – mainly ‘many-to-many’ – emerge. It is within this space that this research is based.

3.1.2 Social change

This study explores the role of digital media in a democratization process from a communication for development perspective, understood as a “social process based on dialogue using a broad range of tools and methods” (FAO, 2006, p.xxi). According to this definition, development implies social change, a concept that suits the characteristics of the research subject. Social change is most commonly understood as a process of transformation in the way society is organised, within institutions and in the distribution of power within various social and political institutions (Figueroa, Kincaid, Rani & Lewis, 2002). This notion is complementary to the understanding of communication for social change as a “process of public and private dialogue through which people define who they are, what they want and how they can get it” (Gray-Felder & Deane, 1999, p.8). It is through communication that people trigger changes in the distribution of power by standing up for their identities and goals in order to reach them in a complex dialogue. ICTs are recognized as “central players” (Granqvist, 2005, p.285) for development purposes and agents of social change.

3.1.3 Democratization

This study embraces primarily the notes on democratization provided by Tilly (2007): “Democratization is a dynamic process that always remains incomplete and perpetually runs the risk of reversal – de-democratization” (p.xi), with a particular interest in the dynamic and incomplete nature of the process of democratization, which needs to be taken into consideration when conducting this research. The changing nature of democratization goes hand in hand with the understanding of social change as a process of transformation. “Given the fluidity of democratisation, the study of mass media and democratisation is aiming at a moving target” (Jebril, Stetka & Loveless, 2013, p.33). The ‘moving target’ of this process means democracy in itself, which Tilly (2007) describes as “the extent to which the state behaves in conformity to the expressed demands of the citizens” (p.13). Being the state an agent of the will of the civil society, democracy as a social organisation may work in pair with the understanding of social change as a process leading to a specific organisation of society and distribution of power. The connection between power and people and the hierarchy among them is also captured in other definitions of democracy. Wolin (2008) for instance understands democracy as “the condition that makes it possible for ordinary people to better their lives by becoming political beings and by making power responsive to their hopes and needs” (p.288). In this case, it is through political action that powers are held accountable for bettering people’s lives.

Regarding the specific link between media – i.e. digital media – and democracy, Carroll and Hackett (2006) describe media democratization as the

“efforts to change media messages, practices, institutions and contexts (including state communication policies) in a direction that enhances democratic values and subjectivity, as well as equal participation in public discourse and societal decision-making” (p.84).

This definition points to the subjective nature of democracy and acknowledges the relevant function of participation through media. Participation is a key component of social change and empowerment through media.

“Participation involves the more equitable sharing of both political and economic power, which often decreases the advantage of certain groups. Structural change involves the redistribution of power” (Servaes, 2002, p.23).

Participation makes people “active agents in the process of meaning-making”, as Deuze (2006, p.66) puts it. Assuming the evolving nature of democratization and the dynamics of social change, both participation and empowerment are what Mefalopulos (2005) calls “the two major pillars of communication for sustainable development” (p.249).

Also Carroll and Hackett (2006) outline the changing nature of democracy and its connection with the concept of social change:

“The concept of media democratization, emphasizing the process, avoids hypostatizing ‘democracy’ as a fixed and final state of affairs. It also connotes the connection between processes of progressive change in the media and those in other social spheres” (p.84).

This research understands democracy as the dynamic result of a process of change driven by the will of citizens in a society where media play a key representational role and where the power serves citizens who are ultimately responsible for decision-making through representational election. Tilly (2009) adds to his notion of democratization the concept of a democratic regime – one where “political relations between the state and its citizens feature broad, equal, protected, mutually binding consultation” (p.80). Hence, democratization “means net movement toward broader, more equal, more protected, and more binding consultation” (p.80) as opposed to ‘de-democratization’.

This research uses Tilly’s definition to analyse to what extent the phrasing in digital media of the ongoing changes in Myanmar can actually be considered the portrait of a democratization process.

3.1.4 Digital media, social change and democratization

The complexity of the ways media operate within societies and the complexity of social change processes call for a cautious approach to analysing the causalities between one and the other. As Couldry (2012) warns, “contradictions, tensions and ambiguities affect media’s social workings at all scales” (p.29). Therefore, linear conclusions on how media

and people interact and affect society or trigger transformational changes should be avoided. Assessing the impact of the Internet and digital media on the political context encounters the same risks, and needs to be carefully weighted. As Bennett (2003) observes, “it is easy to see how conceptual confusion surrounds the political impact of the Internet and other digital media” (p.111).

Due to the complex nature of society, the political, economic, cultural and technological context plays a decisive role for the efficiency of digital media for social changes. According to Wheeler (2011), even “a bit of luck” (p.190) is necessary, together with “the right context, agency, access, imagination” (ibd.) to overcome “poverty and lack of opportunity” (ibd.).

Assuming the importance of context and the need to balance the possibility of an “Internet-enabled democratic effect” (Wheeler, 2011, p.195), positive accounts of the role of digital media can be held. In recent years, the role played by social media during the uprising of the ‘Arab Spring’ has been widely acknowledged, in some cases with unloose enthusiasm:

“The role that social media played in the Egyptian uprising is striking. Social media brought to the Egyptian people a sense of self-empowerment — through the capacity to speak and assemble — that was previously not there. Recently, social media had a similar impact in Tunisia, Libya, and Iran. This moment in history serves as a prompt to think critically and broadly about the role that social media can and should play in developing nations” (Ali, 2011, pp.187-188).

In this statement, Ali emphasizes the aspect of self-empowerment through people’s use of digital media, especially social media. While self-empowerment may go far beyond the creators’ original intentions, it has become a core function of social media networks, especially in developing countries.

Social change and democratization are dynamic processes of transformation. Media, including digital media, have the potential to play a role in society transformation. The context may determine to what extent this potential is fulfilled and in which ways. Assessing the efficiency of digital media for social change and for democratization requires a realistic results-based approach beyond the blinding nature of the platform technology itself and its capacities. The relation between media and democratization can be explored in two ways, according to Carroll and Hackett (2006). The authors distinguish between democratization ‘through’ the media, “the use of media, whether by governments or civil society actors, to promote democratic goals and processes elsewhere in society” (p. 84) on the one hand, and the democratization ‘of’ media themselves on the other hand. A number of conditions nourish the complexity of the relation between democratization and the media, to the point that despite a great amount of research “the possible roles of the newest medium (the Internet) in bringing about (democratic) transition or transforming societies have found little empirical support” (Jebril et al., 2013, p.3). Despite the theoretical potential of digital media to embrace participatory

practices “in a direction which enhances democratic values and subjectivity, as well as equal participation in societal societal decision-making” (Hackett, 2000, p.64), there is a room for critical assessments. In this sense, Hindman (2009) argues that Internet is not succeeding in opening political life but instead it is “shifting the bar of exclusivity from the production to the filtering of political information” (p.13). The gatekeeper function may still be the crucial boundary where the relations of power take place, whether it is held by an editor filtering content, a search engine filtering the display of content, or by a technological limit filtering access to content. As Hindman (2009) adds,

“if we consider the ability of ordinary citizens to write things that other people will see, the Internet has fallen far short of the claims that continue to be made about it. It may be easy to speak in cyberspace, but it remains difficult to be heard” (p.142).

3.2 EXISTING RESEARCH

The author found scarce recent research on Myanmar and the topic of this study. A few articles and reports depict the recent years leading to the ongoing changes in the country. A wider approach is provided by a recent study by Holliday (2012), who argues for an interactive intervention in the ongoing process of opening to foreign direct investment and international development agencies in Myanmar. Although written years before the start of the opening process, Chowdhury’s (2008) article provides solid data and relevant analysis of the role of the Internet for social change in Myanmar. The ‘Saffron Revolution’ of 2007 serves as a case study for a research that depicts the state of Myanmar’s Internet and its influence on the change processes:

“Overall, the Internet has brought about a new dimension to political activism. However, the level of information control within authoritarian countries seems to have important ramifications on the efficacy of Internet-based political activism” (Chowdhury, 2008, p.4).

A compilation published by Skidmore and Wilson (2008) on the ‘Saffron Revolution’ puts the emphasis on the reasons behind the uprisings, analysing the economic and social status of the country at the time, and the ways the military junta addressed power. Using a more ICT-related approach, Human Rights Watch (2013) published relevant research on the telecommunications situation in Myanmar shortly before the two international mobile operators were granted licenses by the Government in early 2014²². The report focuses on the pending legal reform of telecommunications in the country and gives recommendations to the Government. Regarding the role of Myanmar as an international player in the region, Katanyuu (2006) analyses Myanmar’s participation in the regional

²² Ooredoo, Telenor finally set to get Myanmar telecom licenses. (2014, 29 January). *Reuters*. Retrieved 15 May 2014 from <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/01/29/myanmar-telecoms-idUSL3N0L32U120140129>

organisation ASEAN, addressing notions of democratization. From a peace-building perspective, the United States Institute of Peace published the study *Media and Conflict in Myanmar. Opportunities for Media to Advance Peace*, with a broad description of the media landscape in the country, including a chapter on Internet.

On a non-Myanmar-centred scope and related to the topic of study, there is a fair amount of literature addressing questions on digital media (Bradshaw, 2011), social media (Breuer, 2012; Sheombar, 2011; Bohler-Muller & Van der Merwe, 2011; Taki & Coretti, 2013) (many focusing on the ‘Arab Spring’ (Vera Bardici, 2012; Khondker, 2011)) and democratization within development contexts (Kluver & Kiu, 2003). The role of mass media in processes of democratization is addressed by Jebril et al. (2013) in a study with bold conclusions:

“The future research will certainly need to broaden its scope and incorporate the analysis of non-institutionalised forms of communication, as well as actors of civil society which thrive in the rhizomatic structure of cyberspace (e.g. WikiLeaks, Anonymous, etc.), challenging not only the traditional modes of communication but ultimately also the notion of the process of democratisation as such” (p.34).

4 METHODOLOGY

In order to assess the role and potential of digital media on the democratization process in a country with very limited Internet penetration, this study has chosen to use two complementary qualitative methods: discourse analysis and semi-structured interviews. The combination of media narratives constructed by digital media and trends in key stakeholders' behaviour promises greater value than a quantitative analysis, as the very low internet penetration in Myanmar barely allows for significant and representative data on the subject of this study.

4.1 DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

The discourse analysis aims to explore how Myanmar is portrayed in digital media texts and in which ways key terms connected to the democratization process are being used. Foucault's notions of 'power' and of 'discursive formation' underpin this analysis. According to this theory, discourse analysis provides information on how power is deployed in digital media by setting an agenda and by defining the understanding of key terms around democratization.

4.1.1 Description and theoretical discussion

The author will use as a reference Foucault's understanding of discourse analysis, while acknowledging the variety of other approaches. In this sense, the following commonalities of the different approaches to discourse analysis will be considered:

"Language is not a reflection of a pre-existing reality; Language is structured in patterns or discourses; There is not just one general system of meaning as in Saussurian structuralism but a series of systems or discourses, whereby meanings change from discourse to discourse; These discursive patterns are maintained and transformed in discursive practices; The maintenance and transformation of the patterns should therefore be explored through analysis of the specific contexts in which language is in action" (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p.12).

This analysis assumes that the function of media as a means to representation is essentially a form of power: power to convey messages and power to set agendas. Applying Foucault's (1977) notions of 'regime of truth' and 'discursive formation', the analysis will focus on digital media as a battleground for political and economic interests. Hall's (1997, p.15) understanding of representation will be applied to the phrasing of democratization in Myanmar so as to explore the driving forces and motivations behind this process.

According to Hall (1997), representation "is the production of meaning through language" (p.28), while meaning is the result of a process in which social, cultural and linguistic conventions intervene, and which cannot be steadily fixed. Meaning is constructed following a "signifying practice" (p.28), and is therefore subject to change.

Explanations on how this construction of meaning through representation works can be clustered into three main approaches. According to the constructionist approach, which is used in discourse analysis, “things don’t mean: we construct meaning, using representational systems – concepts and signs” (Hall, 1997, p.25).

While the semiotic approach concentrates on the production of meaning through the use of signs in language, the discursive approach focuses on how discourse and discursive practices produce “knowledge (rather than just meaning) through what [Foucault] called discourse (rather than just language)” (Hall, 1997, pp.42-43).

Foucault shifts the attention from language to discourse, understanding discourse as a “group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment” (Hall, 1997, p.44), not as a linguistic concept or a passage of a text or speech. Foucault’s conception of discourse “is situated far more closely to knowledge, materiality and power than it is to language” (Hook, 2001, p.36). These three conditions – knowledge, materiality and power – make Foucault’s approach appealing to this research, as they ask for a historical contextualization.

Foucault (1977) focuses on the relation between knowledge and power. They are narrowly linked, the first being in itself a form of power, the latter playing an important role in deciding whether and in what circumstances certain types of knowledge are to be permitted. Foucault considers the effectiveness of ‘power/knowledge’ more important than the question about truth, as when knowledge has the opportunity to be applied, it can become true, and it is through power that knowledge is given that opportunity (p.27). Therefore, a certain truth at a certain moment does not exist. Instead, certain periods and historical contexts have their own discursive formation which sustain what Foucault (1980) calls a ‘regime of truth’ (p.131). As Hook (2001) rightly states, “to realize that truth is a function of discourse is to realize that the conditions of truth are *precisely* rather than *relatively* contingent on current forms of discourse” (p.7).

4.1.2 Selection of material

The corpus chosen for analysis is a selection of features published in digital media of institutional sources, news agencies, international and bilingual national news outlets. The object of the analysis will be the visit of Myanmar’s President Thein Sein to the US President Barack Obama in Washington on 20 May 2013²³.

To provide the analysis with a first-hand source from the event, the author uses the transcript of the post-meeting remarks by Thein Sein and Barack Obama in the White

²³ Originally, the author aimed to analyse also a second event, namely the release of a significant number of political prisoners in Myanmar at the end of 2013. In the end, this local event was not analysed, firstly because of time constraints, and secondly because the most important digital media coverage was in Myanmar language and therefore out of reach for the current research.

House in Washington²⁴, published on YouTube and on the official websites of the Governments of United States and of Myanmar.

In order to analyse the reactions to the visit in Myanmar's digital media, the author chose two articles from Myanmar's main digital media outlets, *The Myanmar Times*²⁵ and the formerly exiled *DVB*²⁶. *The Myanmar Times* produced a special feature on the visit which was published in the weekly print version. It included four pieces previously published on the website. Three of them were based on newswire reports, while the fourth one was an op-ed (Greenland, 2013) commenting Thein Sein's conference at the Johns Hopkins University in Washington the day after the meeting. *DVB* published an op-ed prior to the visit, several reports based on newswires, as well as a video²⁷ including footage from Reuters and *DVB* editorial content commenting the visit.

To include representative international coverage of the event in the text corpus, the author first conducted research on the media data base Factiva²⁸, which provides full-text access to main international newspapers, newswires, business journals and websites²⁹. From the resulting features texts that covered the event, the author chose one relevant article from the newswire *Agence France-Presse (AFP)*, because at least 14 out of the 43 features were taken from or based on newswires. Out of the remaining articles, one feature from *NYTimes.com* was chosen to show the reactions to Thein Sein's visit in a digital medium from the host country. The *NYTimes.com* article was selected thanks to its large outreach both through the *NYTimes* website³⁰ and social media³¹.

²⁴ The absence in the analysed news coverage of solid sources for strategic statements such as the number of political prisoners released ("hundreds") led the author to search for the origin of such figures in an official statement of the US Government. This approach proved a valuable starting point to explore what Foucault called the 'discursive formation', i.e. "the systematic operation of several discourses or statements constituting a 'body of knowledge', which work together to construct a specific object/topic of analysis in a particular way, and to limit the other ways in which that object/topic may be constituted".

²⁵ Available at <http://www.mmtimes.com/>

²⁶ Available at <http://www.dvb.no/>

²⁷ Obama urges end to violence. (2013, 21 May). *Democratic Voice of Burma*. Retrieved 1 December 2013 from <https://www.dvb.no/dvb-video/obama-urges-end-to-violence/28338>

²⁸ Available at <https://global.factiva.com>

²⁹ Owned by Dow Jones Interactive, Factiva contains over 8,000 publications with content from 188 countries, and serves as a convenient tool for a query sensible to international media organisations and development agencies, both closely related to the topic of study.

³⁰ According to analytics from comScore MediaMetrix from October 2013, *NYTimes.com* has approx. 34 million average monthly unique visitors. Retrieved 18 January 2014 from https://www.comscore.com/Insights/Press_Releases/2013/11/comScore_Media_Metrix_Ranks_Top_50_U.S._Desktop_Web_Properties_for_October_2013

³¹ The article generated 345 'Likes' on Facebook, was shared by 155 Facebook users and commented 29 times (data gathered on 29 May 2014 using SharedCount.com. Available at <http://www.sharedcount.com/>.)

Table 1: Selected features

Thein Sein's official visit to Barack Obama in Wahington - 20 May 2013
(F1) The White House. Office of the Press Secretary: “Remarks by President Obama and President Thein Sein of Myanmar after Bilateral Meeting”
(F2) AFP: “US looks to end Myanmar sanctions after landmark visit”
(F3) <i>The Myanmar Times</i> : “Obama urges action on ethnic conflict”
(F4) DVB: (Analysis) “Checkmate: Burma-US Policy”
(F5) NYTimes.com: (Opinion) “What Obama Needs to Tell Myanmar’s Leader”

The author considers the selection of texts a complex and decisive step of the process and acknowledges the subjectivity of the decisions taken. As Barker (2008) warns, questions about what bodies of materials to choose are not easy to answer. This difficulty not only applies to the selection of texts, but also to the quantity:

“In one direction, with a very small corpus, it is possible to show more detail of the materials (...) but it carries the higher risk of ‘privileged choice’ (...) In the other direction a larger corpus is harder to display, and therefore the methods used to examine it tend to greater opacity” (p.165).



Image 2. *The Myanmar Times* office in Yangon, February 2014 / Santi Mayor Farguell

4.1.3 Limitations of the method

The author is aware of the limitations of discourse analysis. The method does not provide definite answers to the research question, but rather gives insights to debate the topic. As a qualitative method, it does not pretend to produce statistically significant data, and the argumentation will be open to interpretations. “There will always be other perspectives from which to interpret the material under review” (Humes & Bryce, 2003, p.180). The

capacity of the method to provide proper contextualization (Frohmann, 1994, p.119) helps compensate this limitation.

Lack of users' feedback on the selected texts and the local language barrier are further limitations, especially considering the important role of the audience in media discourse analysis: "Many researchers are aware that a theoretical position of media discourse that includes the audience is desirable" (Cotter, 2001, p.421).

A risk when practising discourse analysis is to make an ideologically biased exploration of 'power'. Prejudices and/or preconceived connections between certain linguistic constructions and specific ideologies may occur if the analysis assigns to "newworkers a far more deliberate ideological intervention in news than is supported by the research on news production" (Bell, 1991, p.214). Self-reflexivity and analytical perspective is required to prevent bias.

In this context, it is important to note that the works of Foucault are in themselves "complex, difficult, nuanced, and at times, flawed and contradictory" (Hook, 2001, p.39) regarding concept and methodology. The author acknowledges the difficulties of the method, but considers that the insights provided by the discourse analysis will add value to the study and will compensate for its evident limitations and flaws.

4.2 SEMI-STRUCTURED QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS

This research carries out qualitative semi-structured interviews to explore the usage of digital media by stakeholders in the democratization of Myanmar. The aim is to gather knowledge on how the respondents use digital media and what potential they assign to digital media's capacity to promote democratization.

Interviews with key informants should provide "more meaningful" (Davis, 2008, p.62) material about digital media as drivers of democratization as well as different understandings of the concept of democratization. In this regard, this research addresses the question raised by Katz (1959) – "What do people do with media?" (pp.1-6) –, and follows Couldry's (2012) assumption that "a practice approach starts not with media texts or media institutions but from media-related practice in all its looseness and openness" (p.37).

4.2.1 Description and theoretical discussion

An interview is "a stage upon which knowledge is constructed through the interaction of interviewer and interviewee roles" (Kvale, 1996, p.127). The decision to conduct semi-structured interviews follows the author's will to "allow respondents the chance to be experts and to inform the research" (Leech, 2002, p.668), especially considering that the respondents are key stakeholders in the topic of the study, 'symbolic elites' (Van Dijk, 2010). Moreover, in order to analyse stakeholders' use of digital media and estimation of their potential, interviews allow "a potentially much richer and more sensitive type of data on the dynamics of audiences and their relations to media than the survey" (Hansen,

A., 1998, pp.257-258). According to Pickering (2008b) “experience occupies the contested territory between ways of being and ways of knowing” (p.27).

Among the seven reasons to conduct qualitative interview, as listed by Weiss (1994, pp.9-11), this research acknowledges at least three: the will to describe a process (the use of digital media by respondents), to learn how events are interpreted (how respondents interpret content retrieved through digital media) and to bridge intersubjectivities (to learn about respondents’ customized use of digital media). Moreover, the opportunity of conducting field research allowed learning “not only what a respondent says, but also how the respondent behaved during the interview” (Mosley, 2013, p.7), which allows the researcher to gain “understanding of how to interpret data from observing the respondent’s situation” (ibd.).

Weiss (1994) describes four approaches to analysing and reporting qualitative interviews, depending on whether the report will be ‘issue-focused’ or ‘case-focused’ and whether the report’s intended level of generalization is on the ‘level of the concrete’ or on the ‘level of the generalized’ (p.152). Given the expertise and representativeness of the respondents, the approach chosen for this research is ‘case-focused’ on the level of the ‘concrete’. According to Weiss (ibd.), “what concrete case studies of individuals do superbly is make the reader aware of the respondents’ experience within the context of their lives” (ibd.). Since each respondent provides value-adding information, the qualitative interview method operates with a sample “very much smaller than the samples interviewed by a reasonably ambitious survey study” (Weiss, 1994, p.3). Contrary to more quantitative methods, the data (answers) collected from qualitative interviews is bound to be analysed relying more on “interpretation summary and integration” than on “counting and correlating”, with “the findings of the qualitative study” being “supported more by quotations and case descriptions than by tables or statistical measurements” (ibd.). The subjectivity inherent to the chosen method demands a high level of self-reflexivity in order to build solid trustworthy arguments. The nature of the research, aiming to know about people’s behaviour and choices, also asks for a more organic and subtle approach. As Hollway and Jefferson (2000) state,

“research is only a more formalised and systematic way of knowing about people, but in the process it seems to have lost much of the subtlety and complexity that we use, often as a matter of course, in everyday knowing. We need to bring some of this everyday subtlety into the research process” (p.3).

4.2.2 Selection of respondents and questionnaire

Interviews took place in Yangon, Myanmar, between 20 February 2014 and 5 March 2014, conducted in person and in different locations selected by the interviewees. All the interviews were conducted in English; in some cases³² neither the interviewee nor the interviewer used their mother-tongue language.

³² Interviewees 1, 3, 4 and 6 are English mother-tongue.

For the selection process, local ‘key informants’ (Weiss, 1994, p.20) from UN agencies helped the researcher to contact some of the respondents, while the author contacted directly representatives of media and civil society in Myanmar, mainly via email, SMS and phone calls. The author carried out the selection process providing the interviewees due information on the nature and characteristics of the research and the interview itself, as recommended (Weiss, 1994, p.35).

The author conducted interviews with civil society, bloggers, media, international organisations and the private sector, and tried to balance as much as possible the number of local and of foreign interviewees. While most of the attempts to arrange interviews were successful, three planned interview, with the local Human Rights NGO Equality Myanmar and the two telecommunication operators Ooredoo and Telenor did not take place due to a lack of availability of the interviewees. However, the author finds the final sample representative enough to explore the use of digital media by a ‘symbolic elite’ (Van Dijk, 2010) – a ‘symbolic elite’ that includes civilians, activists engaged in the process of social change in Myanmar for years, international key actors and private investors with a strong interest in digital media.

Table 2: Conducted interviews ³³

#	Name	Position	Date	Location	Duration
1	Tim McLaughlin	Senior Reporter - <i>The Myanmar Times</i>	20-Feb-14	<i>The Myanmar Times</i> office	26'36"
2	Suleman Malik	C4D Specialist - UNICEF Myanmar	20-Feb-14	UNICEF office	47'18"
3	Geoffrey Goddard	Editor-in-Charge (English) - Mizzima Media Group	26-Feb-14	<i>Mizzima</i> office	27'06"
4	Ali Fowle	Video journalist - <i>Democratic Voice of Burma Debate (DVB Debate)</i>	27-Feb-14	Hotel Traders	1h05'
5	Nay Phone Latt	Executive Director Myanmar - ICT for Development Organization (MIDO) (blogger, ex-political prisoner)	28-Feb-14	MIDO office	55'30"
6	Rita Nguyen	Co-Founder & CEO - MySQUAR	04-Mar-14	MySQUAR office	39'03"
7	Phyo Ei Thwe	Program Officer - Scholar Institute	05-Mar-14	Scholar Institute office	23'58"

³³ The author aimed to interview the same number of local and foreign stakeholders. As this attempt was unsuccessful, foreign stakeholders were selected based on the criteria of long-term stay in Myanmar and strong knowledge of Myanmar's reality.

The questionnaire ([annex 8.2](#)) used for the semi-structured interviews was divided into three blocks, corresponding to the three specific areas of the research: a) the use of digital media; b) the experience of the respondents as digital media users with regard to the sample event selected for the discourse analysis; c) understandings of social change and democratization of Myanmar and expectations on digital media. This research takes into consideration guidelines from Pickering (2008a) and Cottle, S., Hansen, A., Negrine, R. & Newbold, C. (1998). The questionnaire intends to be “clear and unambiguous, [...] not to lead the respondents to particular answers” and to “avoid questions that may antagonize or irritate respondents or could be perceived as a threatening” (Negrine & Newbold, 1998, pp.225-256). Due to the semi-structured nature of the method, the questionnaire serves as a tool for overall consistency, but allows for flexibility to facilitate the flow of the respondents’ answers, explanations and opinions. Weiss’ (1994) editing recommendations were followed regarding the format of transcriptions³⁴.

4.2.3 Limitations of the method

The main limitations of the method are its subjectivity and feasibility. Subjectivity is inherent to the method, as it attempts to obtain relevant inputs for analysis. The subjective nature of the research must be acknowledged in all cases. As Mosley (2013) exemplifies, “a different researcher – one who is older, male, and African American, for instance – may well receive different responses to his questions and understand the same responses in a different way” (p.13). However, a proper management of the research, relying on self-reflexivity, a proper design of the questionnaire and selection of interviewees, should provide the study with a levelled outcome. In order to get beyond the inevitable participation of subjectivity, Mason (2002) suggests “to treat the interview as a site of knowledge construction, and the interviewee and interviewer as co-participants in the process” (p.227). Semi-structured qualitative interviews appear as an adequate method to enable this co-participation in the knowledge construction.

The feasibility of the research design is another limitation to bear in mind. Weiss (1994) argues that qualitative interviews are “labor intensive” (p.11), but acknowledges that in general time is well invested with this type of research. As in all areas of learning, all is possible but not all is feasible. Negrine and Newbold (1998) sustain that “there are ideal questionnaires and ideal methods but in the context of a carefully funded research project of limited duration, the ideal is soon reduced to the practicable and the feasible” (p.234).

³⁴ “If a study’s budget is limited, consideration might be given to listening to a tape once, transcribing only what seems likely to be useful and paraphrasing the rest or noting something like “From minute 24 through 29 discussion of relationship with boss”. Another approach is to take notes on what is contained on the tape, never transcribing at all except for questions to be used in the report. Still another approach is to take notes during the interview even though it is also being tape-recorded. The notes, when typed, can provide an index to the tape, and transcriptions can be done as needed” (Weiss, R. S., 1994, pp.55-56).

4.3 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

‘Validity’ relates to “the nature of our findings, and the degree to which these are a true reflection of what we formally state we are dealing with in declaring our aims and objectives” (Halloran, 1998, p.19). On its part, reliability implies replicability.

“Reliability is normally considered to be high if two or more researchers, addressing the same subject with the same methods, come up with the same, or very nearly the same results” (Halloran, 1998, pp.18-19).

According to Barker (2008, p.165) qualitative methods are harder for analysts to check than quantitative ones. For qualitative methods, reliability will depend on how trustworthy the researcher’s line of argumentation is. Likewise, validity will depend on a number of accumulative decisions the researcher takes throughout the research.

Since discourse analysis “does not explain the world” (Barker, 2008, p.163) but “helps us to understand parts of it” (ibd.), it is the researcher’s modesty that should help the study acquire “trustworthiness” (ibd.). Referring to interviews, Mosley (2013) argues that

“concerns about validity revolve around whether the researcher is asking the right questions, or asking questions in the right way, as well as whether the interview participant is offering truthful answers” (p.21).

Creating a relationship of trust between interviewer and interviewee helps create an appropriate scenario for the validity of the interview material. Ultimately, among Weiss’ arguments to justify the need to generalize from the samples (Weiss, 1994), the “theory independent of qualifiers” sounds pertinent: “We might acknowledge that our sample is not representative but argue that there is no reason for the theory to be limited to the sample from which it was developed” (p.28).

4.4 SELF-REFLEXIVITY AND ETHICAL ISSUES

Reflexivity and awareness of subjectivity help develop a healthy distance to the chosen research methods. “[For] the researcher’s own account of how the analysis ‘came to be the way it is’, clarity, reflexivity and openness are crucial” (Lawler, 2008, p.47). As Nightingale (2008) puts it,

“self-reflexivity is also important during the analysis and writing of the fieldwork experience, since it is in these activities that the researcher’s power to shape the representation of the research exchanges is greatest. It is where sensitivity to the meaning for the research subjects of the observer’s presence can potentially be best integrated into the research report” (p.107).

Considering that this research is based in cultural settings different to the researcher’s own, the risks of ethnocentrism and cultural prejudices need to be born in mind. For instance, the risk of applying a Western paternal approach to how democracy and media should look like in Myanmar is evident.

The author's role and position is a sensitive issue. The risk to "tend to equate pretentious speculation and interpretation with theory" (Halloran, 1998, p.13) obliged the author of this study to take steps back to ensure that the purpose of applying a "critical eclectic approach" (Pickering, 2008b, p.32) would not exceed the realistic capacities of the research. Critical distance to the chosen methods and approaches led to adaptations and redefinitions of the research design. Ultimately, research – especially on subject matters that are still subject to change – requires flexibility. With flexibility "(...) unforeseen lines of inquiry can be pursued, new findings secured and, following a period of conceptual and theoretical labour, revised understanding may result" (Pickering, 2008a, p.37). As stated by Halloran (1998), research that does not attempt "to do the impossible (establish unilinear, causal relationships)" might lead to "more progress and be seen as more credible" (p.15).

5 ANALYSIS

“What if social networking sites induce a shift in our sense of what news is – from public politics to social flow – a change as fundamental perhaps as the birth of ‘news’ itself in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries?” (Couldry, 2012, p.166)

5.1 PHRASING IN DIGITAL MEDIA OF DEMOCRATIZATION IN MYANMAR

In order to address the question ‘How do digital media depict the current changes in Myanmar?’ this discourse analysis primarily uses Foucault’s notions of ‘power’ and ‘knowledge’. Discourse analysis includes a constellation of different approaches (Lea, 1996). Therefore, this research employs notions from other methods such as critical discourse analysis and media studies.

According to Foucault “knowledge [is] put to work through discursive practices in specific institutional settings to regulate the conduct of others” (Hall, 1997, p.47). The selected text corpus will be analysed in terms of knowledge and discursive practices to demonstrate the authors’ understandings of democracy and social change. The analysis should provide a critical view of the way digital media phrase the democratization of Myanmar.

The text corpus includes features related to the visit of President Thein Sein to President Barack Obama in Washington on 20 May 2013. The renewal of economic sanctions and violation of human rights issues underpinned this meeting. Five features were chosen for analysis, each addressing the visit from a different angle:

- Feature 1 (F1) is the transcript of the official remarks from the two Presidents after the meeting.
- Feature 2 (F2) is a newswire from *AFP* published on the day following the meeting, including reactions from several stakeholders on the Myanmar-USA relationship.
- Feature 3 (F3) is a news report published by *The Myanmar Times* the day following the meeting, based on two *AFP* newswires.
- Feature 4 (F4) is an op-ed published by *DVB* before the meeting.
- Feature 5 (F5) is an op-ed published by *NYTimes.com*, after the meeting.

5.1.1 Subjects

This analysis does not aim to research the background of the features’ authors, but to depict what voices sustain what regimes of truth via different types of discourse formation. The answer to the question “What does it matter who’s speaking?” (Beckett quoted by Foucault, 1969) is that revealing the real voice and purpose of a text shall

provide a better understanding of the power relations within the discourse. Foucault inverted the assumption of author-generates-discourse, claiming instead that discourse “give(s) rise to subjects (like authors) with privileged positions” (Hook, 2001, p.11).

The features portray President Thein Sein as a leader in a privileged yet controversial position:

- “We very much appreciate your efforts and leadership” ([F1](#)),
- “President Thein Sein, a general-turned-civilian who ended Myanmar’s long isolation from the West” ([F2](#)),
- “Thein Sein, who took office as a nominal civilian in 2011, said that the reforms he has undertaken were ‘unprecedented’ and called for ‘maximum international support’ ([F3](#));
- “(...) President Thein Sein, former junta leader turned President (...)” ([F4](#)) and
- “(...) if Thein Sein’s government makes this effort [to respect human rights and end ethnic and religious conflicts], its already heralded path of reform has a good chance of success (...)” ([F5](#)).

All texts depict Thein Sein as a new relevant player who is praised by his counterpart in the USA. The newswire ([F2](#)) and news report ([F3](#)) hail Myanmar’s President as a reformer, while the two op-eds ([F4](#) and [F5](#)) critically salute him. In his own speech, Thein Sein establishes a relationship to Barack Obama that shows gratitude (“My sincere thanks”, “I am very grateful”, “Thanks to the U.S. government”, [F1](#)) as well as dependency (“...we will also need the assistance and understanding from the international community, including the United States”, [F1](#)).

The harshest criticism in the texts do not concern Thein Sein individually, but rather the Myanmar government as a whole, and Barack Obama’s administration for “ignoring human rights while courting investment opportunities and political favour” ([F4](#)). Thein Sein is represented with a certain level of impunity (and humanized for speaking “good English”), as if commitments to certain values were less expected from Myanmar’s President as than from the US President. By contrast, Barack Obama is harshly criticised for engaging with Myanmar’s government despite evidence of human rights violations in the country.

5.1.2 Discursive practices

In the following, three examples of discursive formations show the construction of particular regimes of truth:

The first discursive formation affirms that good will and progress deserves a loosening of sanctions and more economic investment. It is deployed throughout both Presidents’ speeches:

Barack Obama: “What has allowed this shift in relations is the leadership that President Sein has shown in moving Myanmar from a path of both political and economic reform”;

Thein Sein: “(...) So for democracy to flourish in our country, we will have to move forward and we will have to undertake reforms – political reforms and economic reforms in the years ahead” ([F1](#)).

The second discursive formation, used in the allegedly objective newswire [F2](#) and news report [F3](#), argues that sanctions should not be withdrawn based only on good will and investment should come only with evidence of progress.

“President Barack Obama has already waived most sanctions on Myanmar but Congress has kept the laws on the books, hoping that the threat of reimposing the restrictions would motivate the government to address concerns” ([F2](#));

“Obama said that once tortured US-Myanmar relations had eased because of ‘the leadership that President Sein has shown in moving Myanmar down a path of both political and economic reform’” ([F3](#)).

The third discursive formation indicates that not only Myanmar is not undergoing a process towards democracy and freedom, but despite the loosening of international sanctions the situation of minorities is worsening.

“The Burmese government has been shrewd with their public rhetoric in making the world believe Burma is on the path toward freedom and democracy for all” ([F4](#)).

Feature [F4](#) stands somewhere between the second and third discursive formations. On the one hand its authors acknowledge that “first steps toward freedom are being taken”. On the other hand they denounce evidence of human rights violations “including rape, torture and killings” ([F4](#)). As Hook (2001) states, “discourse works in discontinuous and often contradictory ways” (p.24).

The coexistence of at least three contrasting discursive formations on the same topic supports Hall’s (1997) theory that “knowledge linked to power not only assumes the authority of ‘the truth’ but has the power to make itself true” (p.49). In the words of Hook (2001), “‘the truth’ is product of discourse and power: a displacement of the will-to-truth by the will-of-power” (p.6). According to Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) the struggle between different “knowledge claims” is the struggle between different discourses representing a “different understanding of aspects of the world” (p.2).

The next step of this analysis consists in exploring how these discursive formations intend to sustain their regime of truth in relation to the democratization of Myanmar.

First discursive formation

A brief historical summary introduces the first discursive formation: after years of what Obama describes as “significant bilateral tensions”, reciprocal visits to Yangon and Washington led to “a candid and frank discussion with President Obama”, as Thein Sein calls it ([F1](#)). Two years of a “steady process” of reforms together with “credible elections” have “allowed” the US government to “relax sanctions” ([F1](#)). There is an underlying regime of truth based on the assumption that by doing ‘the right thing’, Myanmar is accordingly and naturally rewarded: “Obviously...”, “As a consequence...”, “And this has also allowed...”. The “path of both political and economic reform” is used to justify this ‘truth’ ([F1](#)).

By establishing a cause-effect logic, this discursive formation pretends to be unbiased and purely fact-based. The alleged cause-effect scheme between the US-Myanmar relations is reinforced in Barack Obama’s speech by referring to the reactions of the international community: “...the United States has been able to relax sanctions that had been placed on Myanmar, and many countries around the world have followed suit” ([F1](#)).

Once the hierarchy of power has been established by Barack Obama and acknowledged by Thein Sein, the remarks refer to the implications of democratization in Myanmar. This discursive formation shows different positions of both speakers: While Barack Obama only mentions once the term ‘democracy’, ‘democratic’ or ‘democratization’, Thein Sein uses them 15 times in his remarks. Obama refers instead to “political and economic reform”, “steady process”, “political process”, “changes in policy”, “long journey”, “political reforms”, “a new direction”, variations of a same “recipe” for “not only a successful democracy but also a thriving economy” ([F1](#)). A “thriving economy” is the ultimate goal to be achieved, the “ultimately correct path to follow” ([F1](#)). Obama’s line of argumentation makes the audience understand that Myanmar is undergoing a process of democratization, but that it is not yet a democracy. However, despite this assumption, some US investment projects have “already initiated” ([F1](#)).

By contrast, Thein Sein repeatedly refers to ‘democracy’, ‘democratic’ and ‘democratization’ in his remarks. While he admits that Myanmar’s democratic government is “just two years old”, he claims that Myanmar and the United States of America “have similar political systems” ([F1](#)). In this respect both speakers disagree notably. Obama refers to the future, Thein Sein by contrast talks about the present. While the stage of democratization in Myanmar is discussed, the need for starting mainly economic reforms seems out of question. In this respect, both Presidents agree: “So for democracy to flourish in our country, we will have to move forward and we will have to undertake reforms – political reforms and economic reforms in the years ahead” ([F1](#)). The discursive formation implies a regime of truth that describes economic development through increased trade and investment as an essential prerequisite of democracy, as it “can produce jobs and higher standards of living” ([F1](#)). Barack Obama and Thein Sein show an understanding ‘a la carte’ of democracy that matches the notion of democracy as a ‘moving target’ (Jebrell et al., 2013, p.33).

Second discursive formation

The newswire and news report include a different discursive formation. Quotations from a number of sources, e.g. Barack Obama, Thein Sein, lawmakers from the Democratic Party, the US Ambassador in Myanmar, the Director of the Asian Studies Centre and two Republican senators, are used to build the readers' opinion without explicit biased statements by the journalists. The credibility of this discourse formation relies on the credibility of the sources. Generalizations and categorization of sources such as 'many experts' and 'the cynics' reveal that both texts are by no means unbiased: "Critics say..." ([F2](#)), "...those within Burma who want to slow or reverse reform" ([F2](#)), "The visit went ahead despite accusations by human rights groups" ([F3](#)), "Thein Sein surprised even cynics by freeing hundreds of political prisoners..." ([F3](#)).

Who are those critics, anti-reformists, human rights groups and cynics and, more important, what are their causes of concern? Little room is granted in this discourse formation for their arguments. Their marginalization compromises an important condition for media democratization, i.e. "equal participation in public discourse and societal decision-making" (Carroll & Hackett, 2006, p.84).

Following a brief historical reference ("the historic symbolism of the visit" ([F2](#)), "the first leader of his country in almost 50 years to visit the White House" ([F3](#))), the discourse develops through a series of statements on the two main issues addressed, i.e. human rights violation and the ongoing reforms. Both topics are interlinked. In [F3](#), Obama's request for more political reforms ("The displacement of people, the violence directed towards them, needs to stop") resonates in Sein's acknowledgement of the need to address the issue ("We must end all forms of discrimination and ensure not only that intercommunal violence is brought to a halt, but that all perpetrators are brought to justice"). [F2](#) confronts two external sources to demonstrate the linkages between both issues: "I believe renewing sanctions would be a slap in the face to Burmese reformers and embolden those within Burma who want to slow or reverse reform", says Republican Senator Mitch McConnell. By contrast, the Director of the Asian Studies Centre warns that support to Thein Sein "does potentially send the wrong signal back to people in Burma who are still struggling". Hence, the discursive formation lies in between the different understandings of the ongoing reform process in Myanmar, one fully supportive; the other one critical.

Both features lack substantial criticism: the reforms undertaken by the Myanmar Government are praised even if human rights issues still need to be addressed. On the horizon, the elections of 2015 appear as the test for the success of the ongoing reform process: "The most important test will come in 2015" ([F2](#)); "The most critical test of reform will come in 2015" ([F3](#)). A certain ambiguity underpins this discourse formation. On the one hand there is a need for reforms: "The US president said that Thein Sein had made 'genuine efforts' to solve the intricate ethnic wars that have long torn at Myanmar's unity, but expressed 'deep concern' on the plight of Rohingya Muslim minority" ([F3](#)). On the other hand, the features acknowledge that economic agreements are being reached

between both countries: “The United States and Myanmar on Tuesday also signed an accord to formalize dialogue on trade, a day after Thein Sein surprised US business leaders by making a pitch in good English for investment in poor but growing Myanmar” ([F2](#)). While both features suggest that political reforms and investment go hand in hand, reforms are not considered a precondition for investment.

Third discursive formation

A third discursive formation claims that there is no reason to relax sanctions, as the conditions that once justified sanctions still prevail despite the alleged opening and reform process undertaken by the Government of Myanmar. This discursive formation entails the following regime of truth: The shift in the relationship between the international community and the Government of Myanmar is due only to economic interests, but not to accomplishments in the protection of human rights. “Rather than a measured action-for-action policy, an encourage-the-reformers-only policy has taken its place” ([F4](#)).

The use of the rhetoric question “Why?” in feature 4 serves to raise the audience’s attention to the main message of the article stating that the “dramatic shift in US-Burma policy” is due to “an opportunity for fiscal, capital gains” ([F4](#)). To flesh out this hypothesis, the author of the op-ed refers to hundreds of new unaccounted political prisoners jailed and tortured, ethnic cleansing of minorities, “atrocious” human rights abuses, rape, sexual violence, use of child soldiers, murder, impunity and torture ([F4](#))³⁵. Eye witnesses from civil society organizations, ethnic political leaders, Thai-Burmese border based organisations, internal displaced persons (IDPs) and Kachin leaders are mentioned as sources of credibility ([F4](#)).

This discursive formation contrasts openly with the dominating regime of truth in feature 1:

“It became quite clear that there has been a significant shift in Burma as well, but make no mistake in believing it is positive, despite what the Obama administration would have you believe (...). We saw first-hand that not only has nothing changed for many, but in fact it is getting much worse for ethnic minorities” ([F4](#)).

Feature 4 therefore gives voice to what feature 3 and feature 5 call ‘the cynics’. Despite being depreciated by the dominating regime of truth, it is ‘the cynics’ who best substantiate their discourse with references to characteristics of democracy and democratization (Tilly, 2007), such as equality of opportunities and minorities rights:

“Where once the international community stood for the voiceless in Burma, political players are now selling out for investment, and because of this, ethnic

³⁵ Tilly (2009) describes a ‘democratic regime’ as one where “political relations between the state and its citizens feature broad, equal, protected, mutually binding consultation” (p.80).

minorities, civil society groups and farmers now feel abandoned and betrayed” ([F4](#))³⁶.

The confrontation of these three discursive formations is a case of convergence of dynamic attempts to impose regimes of truth in a reality that is being constructed/represented (Hall, 1997). Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) argue that “the analyst has to work with what has actually been said or written, exploring patterns in and across the statements and identifying the social consequences of different discursive representations of reality” (p.21). This analysis intended to confront the different ways of representing reality, taking into account “implicit assumptions in texts, which contribute to producing or reproducing unequal relations of power, relations of domination” (Fairclough, 1995, p.14). The categorization of the text corpus into three discursive formations allowed to depict the complex and often intertwined regimes of truth that aim to become knowledge/power in order to influence and provoke social change.

In this sense, the feature published by *NYTimes.com* (F5) is symptomatic. Its discursive formation contains elements from the other three discursive formations. In its last paragraph the different constructions of meaning collide:

“We urge Thein Sein to prove the cynics wrong and we urge President Obama to leave the Burmese leader in no doubt as to what the international community expects of him” (F5).

To conclude, this discourse analysis has shown that digital media portray democratization in Myanmar as a mix of rhetoric statements on human rights issues and ideological assumptions on the role of the economy for social change. Democratization is therefore presented as a double tracked path where conditions (reforms) and consequences (investment) run in parallel “despite human rights violations”.

5.2 KEY STAKEHOLDERS ON THE USAGE OF DIGITAL MEDIA

The author conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews in order to answer the following research questions: How do stakeholders in Myanmar use digital media for democratization? To what extent can digital media become a tool for democratization within a very limited connectivity context? What are the challenges of using digital media for democratization purposes in Myanmar? Throughout the research, the author noticed the particular importance of the use of Facebook in Myanmar; therefore, this topic is dedicated its own sub-chapter in the analysis.

³⁶ Servaes (2002) argues that “structural change involves the redistribution of power” (p.23). According to feature 4, however, in Myanmar there is an “incredible disparity between military and civilian”.

5.2.1 How do stakeholders in Myanmar use digital media for democratization?

In order to assess stakeholders' usage of digital media, the author asked them how they informed themselves about the event subject to the discourse analysis (Thein Sein's visit to Barack Obama). Their answers suggest that digital media are a key, and, in most cases, the only source: “[The role of digital media is] crucial ... they absolutely made a difference” (McLaughlin, 2014, [annex 8.3.1](#)); “if it wasn't for digital media, we wouldn't have any information about that event because it was all provided online” (Goddard, 2014, [annex 8.3.3](#)); “digital media is really the only real way I access media” (Fowle, 2014, [annex 8.3.4](#)); “most of the news I got from Facebook” (Latt, 2014, [annex 8.3.5](#)); “I need broader views [than national sources]. Much of the stories that were coming about this Thein Sein visit were actually international” (Nguyen, 2014, [annex 8.3.6](#)).

Asked about the main types of usage they make of digital media, stakeholders mentioned publication, retrieving and monitoring of content, outreach increase, audience engagement, education, capacity building and networking ([annex 8.3](#)). Remarkably, interactivity is not among the most commonly mentioned usage types, although it is a defining characteristic of digital media and “a necessary condition for social, political and cultural participation” (Lievrouw, 2011, p.15).

Technical limitations restrict the use of digital media in Myanmar enormously. Only an elite of 1 percent of the population accesses the Internet, while almost 42 percent listens to the radio (Malik, 2014, [annex 8.3.2](#)). The 1 percent accessing Internet does so mainly through slow and unstable connections, which limits interactivity.

However, Rita Nguyen, CEO of the Myanmar-language social network MySQUAR, considers that beyond technical issues, such as the high price of SIM cards or the cost of Internet access, it is the content that fuels participation. Users do not surf the Internet for the sake of it, “they come because there's something they want to do or there's something they need to do” (Nguyen, 2014, [annex 8.3.6](#)). For MySQUAR, audience research is therefore crucial for digital media operators (ibd.). “You can't assume that utilization will happen automatically, unless there are very strategic inputs”, confirms Suleman Malik (2014, [annex 8.3.2](#)), UNICEF communication for development expert in Myanmar..

Amplifying the outreach of content is the main interest for newsmakers from *DVB Debate* (Fowle, 2014, [annex 8.3.4](#)), *Mizzima* (Goddard, 2014, [annex 8.3.3](#)) and *The Myanmar Times* (McLaughlin, 2014, [annex 8.3.1](#)). For them, digital media is not only new ground for business competition (McLaughlin, 2014, [annex 8.3.1](#)), but a mandatory channel: “If you are in the media and you are not in digital media, you're dead,” says Goddard. For the now returned exile media *Mizzima*³⁷, *The Irrawaddy* and *DVB*, going digital was a

³⁷ *Mizzima* started publishing in 1998 in India, but operated afterwards also from Thailand. *DVB* and *The Irrawaddy* both started operating in Thailand in 1992 and 1993 accordingly.

natural choice during exile in Thailand, where Internet access was satisfactory (Goddard, 2014, [annex 8.3.3](#)).

Digital media are used also for networking purposes, especially by activists and civil society organisations. Here, Poster's (1995) view of digital media as a decentralized network architecture comes into play. Nay Phone Latt (2014, [annex 8.3.5](#)), award-winning blogger, ex-political prisoner and Executive Director of MIDO, considers digital media "essential" for the organisation, particularly in order to set up projects with several participants through Facebook. Due to the low Internet penetration rate in Myanmar, MIDO also uses print media and other channels to increase the dissemination of their messages and activities.

MIDO (Latt, 2014, [annex 8.3.5](#)), the Scholar Institute (Thwe, 2014, [annex 8.3.7](#)), *DVB Debate* (Fowle, 2014, [annex 8.3.4](#)) and UNICEF (Malik, 2014, [annex 8.3.2](#)) all acknowledge the importance of digital media for educational and capacity building purposes. This is a relevant function within a process of democratization. Capacity building aims to empower people with tools to better their lives, one of the characteristics of democracy according to Wolin (2008, p.288). Together with participation, empowerment is a pillar of communication for sustainable development (Mefalopulos, 2005, p.249).

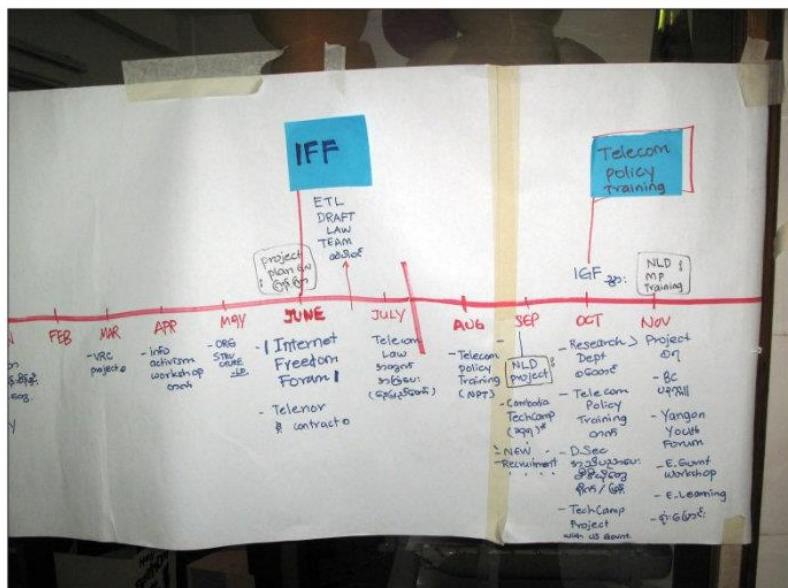


Image 3. Board showing the yearly work-plan at MIDO office in Yangon, February 2014 / Santi Mayor Farguell

5.2.2 To what extent can digital media become a tool for democratization within a limited connectivity context?

Beyond content dissemination, digital media, as media in general, can play a role in social change, as Suleman Malik (2014, [annex 8.3.2](#)) explains:

"Media brings in the information which gives you new ideas. Media brings in the information which encourages you and persuades you when you are in the process of change."

Their usefulness depends on “how strategically and intelligently” (ibd.) they are employed. According to Malik, the lack of information, especially in rural areas, was the main obstacle to social change. When Myanmar people had access to the “right information” (ibd.), they were able to apply it.

Regarding digital media’s potential for democratization in Myanmar, the ‘Saffron Revolution’ is a good example, in spite of the country’s lowest Internet penetration rate of the region³⁸. Comparing the ‘Saffron Revolution’ with the first major uprising against the military rule in 1988, Nay Phone Latt (2014, [annex 8.3.5](#)) explains that

“mediawise and in terms of how the news spread to the outside world, the world doesn’t know much about the 1988 [uprising], but they know about the 2007 uprising. That is due to the help of digital media and also due to the help of bloggers”.

According to Goddard, the ‘Saffron Revolution’ was

“one of the first powerful examples where the government’s attempts to control stories were a complete failure because people were just getting stuff out there on digital media” (Goddard, 2014, [annex 8.3.3](#)).³⁹

As a further example of digital media’s power to strengthen democratization Tim McLaughlin (2014, [annex 8.3.1](#)) mentions the end of media censorship in 2012. In his opinion, the traditional pre-printing censorship was abolished, as digital media became more and more popular and the control of online content became “technically virtually impossible”.

While all stakeholders agree on the potential of digital media, they have different opinions about the impact of the low Internet penetration rate. Tim McLaughlin (2014, [annex 8.3.1](#)) from *The Myanmar Times* claims that the reach of digital media is generally higher than “people on the outside [of Myanmar] looking in would think”. He argues that the mix of an underdeveloped country with low Internet penetration rates makes people conclude that “nobody is reading [digital media] online”. McLaughlin (ibd.) refuses this view and gives as an example people using smartphones in restaurants. However, he admits that due to the low uploading and downloading speed, *The Myanmar Times* does not publish videos regularly.

³⁸ Myanmar has the region’s lowest Internet penetration rate (2013, 19 May). *AsiaOne News*. Retrieved 28 May 2014 from <http://news.asiaone.com/News/Latest+News/Digital1/Story/A1Story20130519-423771.html>

³⁹ A similar role of digital media was observed three years later during the ‘Arab Spring’, when social media brought to the Egyptian people the capacity to “speak and assemble – that was previously not there” (Ali, 2011, p.187).

Rita Nguyen (2014, [annex 8.3.6](#)) from MySQUAR considers that the 1 percent penetration rate does not allow for digital media based social change strategies. She hopes for opportunities, when the new telecommunications companies start operating: “We need to think about the 30 percent that are going to be on [mobile] phone” (ibd.). Suleman Malik (2014, [annex 8.3.2](#)) from UNICEF confirms that limited connectivity challenges social change strategies and notes that under current conditions, no campaign can use digital media in rural areas: “If we are going to do a polio campaign in ten townships of Rakhine, we will not be choosing all the digital media”.

Low connectivity increases the knowledge gap in the field of information technology. Therefore, various stakeholders stress the importance of capacity development in this area. According to Nguyen (2014, [annex 8.3.6](#)), the lack of professional web developers and consequently the difficulty of building websites in Myanmar has prompted many companies to host their technical platforms abroad (e.g. MySQUAR’s team of developers is based in Vietnam). Instead of professional websites, many organizations use Facebook in Myanmar. The user-friendly all-in-one social network allows users to publish content and interact simply by creating a user account: “Facebook is already up there. You just add your information to it and it’s a ready-made website and everyone knows how to use it”, says Ali Fowle (2014, [annex 8.3.4](#)).

Nay Phone Latt (2014, [annex 8.3.5](#)) stresses the need to empower citizens through Internet and social media literacy training, and outlines the educational potential of the Internet: “If you can use the Internet, there are so many things on the Internet that can support your education”. In the same spirit, Ali Fowle (2014, [annex 8.3.4](#)) argues that there is a need for capacity building in the critical, responsible and respectful use of digital media, given the lack of democratic culture in the country. According to her, *DVB Debate* struggles to convey the concept of ‘debate’ and to build the ground for public disagreement (*DVB Debate*’s slogan is “Agree to disagree”) (ibd.). This type of capacity building is crucial for Myanmar’s democratization, because it helps people to become what Wolin (2008) calls “political beings” (p.288), a requisite for democracy.

In spite of the ongoing technological barriers, Myanmar might soon go through high-speed technological transformation. Expectations for improvement of connectivity are high with the arrival of Telenor and Ooredoo. The convergence of mobile phone technology and Internet is a priority of the Government of Myanmar⁴⁰ and an opportunity for social change strategies, as connectivity issues are “a major obstacle for the progress of societies regarded as less developed” (Granqvist, 2005, p.286).

The country is going “from nothing at all, no communication and no telephones, to 4G devices; from a paper banking system to mobile banking”, says Ali Fowle (2014, [annex 8.3.4](#)).

⁴⁰ Open Technology Fund. A Radio Free Asia Program (2013). *Internet Access and Openness: Myanmar 2012*. Retrieved 10 April 2014 from https://www.opentechfund.org/files/reports/otf_myanmar_access_openness_public.pdf

5.2.3 The challenges of using digital media for democratization in Myanmar

Carroll and Hackett (2006) distinguish between democratization ‘through’ the media and democratization ‘of’ the media. For the latter to take place in Myanmar, a number of conditions should improve, such as capacity development opportunities, strengthening of democratic values and improvement of connectivity, participation and interactivity. For the time being, Myanmar presents characteristics of democratization ‘through’ the media, because media are used “whether by government or civil society actors, to promote democratic goals and processes elsewhere in society” (p.84).

When asked how digital media could help promote “democratic goals and processes” (Carroll & Hackett, 2006, p.84), stakeholders agree that there is a lack of understanding of what democracy actually means: “Everybody said that we wanted democracy, but they don’t really know about democracy”, argues Nay Phone Latt (2014, [annex 8.3.5](#)). One way to address this lack of understanding is to provide citizens with information that allows them to take more informed decisions. Digital media can play an important role in this process in at least two ways: Firstly, “access to information” (Fowle, 2014, [annex 8.3.4](#)) must be provided to people “in the hope that they might be able to make informed decisions” (Goddard, 2014, [annex 8.3.3](#)). Secondly, the educational system must include a “curriculum about democracy, democratic parties, culture and also ICT” (Latt, 2014, [annex 8.3.5](#)).

Regarding increased access to information, the lifting of Internet censorship in 2012 has permitted access to digital media such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, allowing Myanmar’s users to “know what is happening around here and also post information on what is happening around here” (Thwe, 2014, [annex 8.3.7](#)). However, access to more sources does not imply strengthening democratic habits. In this sense, the experience of the television program *DVB Debate* is characteristic: “I’d like to say that we have people saying, ‘Great point’, or something like that. Unfortunately, [this is not happening, at least] not at the moment”, admits Fowle (2014, [annex 8.3.4](#)), who explains that for people in Myanmar it is difficult to “openly disagree with each other”.

In this respect, empowerment of the local civil society is crucial, Rita Nguyen (2014, [annex 8.3.6](#)) affirms: “[Myanmar] is not a country that is going to be changed by a few foreigners who are in the market. It’s going to be changed by the locals”. In order to empower the locals, it is necessary to “get them connected and telling us what is going on” (ibd.).⁴¹ As Waisword (2005, p.78) argues, the integration of top-down and bottom-up approaches is a key idea for communication for development.

With regard to the specific challenges of using digital media in rural areas, Rita Nguyen (2014, [annex 8.3.6](#)) stresses the need to empower farmers, e.g. using mobile phone

⁴¹ Nguyen’s statement evokes Servaes’ (2002) understanding of ‘participation’, which involves the more equitable sharing of both political and economic power.

applications that help promote social change. As part of its corporate social responsibility programme, MySQUAR engages in capacity building in rural areas.

Probably the greatest challenge regarding the use of digital media for democratization in Myanmar is hate speech in forms of rumours, counter-information, decontextualized images and offensive texts. Geoffrey Goddard (2014, [annex 8.3.3](#)), Ali Fowle (2014, [annex 8.3.4](#)), Nay Phone Latt (2014, [annex 8.3.5](#)) and Phyo Ei Thwe (2014, [annex 8.3.7](#)) express their concerns about it. The current tensions between Buddhists and Muslims in Rakhine State fuel hate speech, and digital media deliver an anonymous platform to reach a broad audience⁴².

The spread of hate speech in digital media triggers discussions about the limits of freedom of speech. Measures of content restriction such as self-censorship or censorship are mentioned. In this regard, Nay Phone Latt (2014, [annex 8.3.5](#)) explains the difficulties of restricting hate speech in a country with scarce democratic tradition:

“I realized that in democracy, you have the right to get your basic rights and you also have to take the responsibility. Your action and your speech cannot hurt any other people. That kind of nature is not so popular in our country”.

He makes a distinction between different types of hate speech: the one that attacks individuals and the “dangerous speech”, which poses a risk “for the society” as a whole (ibd.). This approach, rooted in the collective tradition of Myanmar’s society, led MIDO to start an “anti dangerous speech” campaign which uses intensively digital media (ibd.). Phyo Ei Thwe (2014, [annex 8.3.7](#)) argues that all inappropriate content “should be censored”. Geoffrey Goddard (2014, [annex 8.3.3](#)) reluctantly supports “some kind of moderation”. Ali Fowle (2014, [annex 8.3.4](#)) and Tim McLaughlin (2014, [annex 8.3.1](#)) express their concerns about digital media’s credibility, if everyone could publish hate speech without editorial control.

The debate on hate speech in digital media is not limited to Myanmar. As Geoffrey Goddard (2014, [annex 8.3.3](#)) warns: “The challenge exists in any country: that debate is going to be reasonable, intelligent and tolerant”⁴³.

5.2.4 The role of Facebook

While conducting field research, the author found evidence of the important role of Facebook as a tool for social change in Myanmar. Facebook is used for several purposes,

⁴² Carroll and Hackett (2006) warn of “conservative or reactionary” uses of media reforms that may reinforce “patterns of hierarchy and exclusion” (p.84).

⁴³ Regarding different uses of digital media, Hill (2002) reports that “separatist and minority ethnic groups” in Indonesia use the Internet as a medium to achieve their “self-determination or international recognition for their aspirations” (p.26).

namely coordination, posting and retrieval of information, amplification of outreach, newsfeed, capacity building, blogging, networking, marketing and interactivity.

While networking and interactivity are certainly key assets of Facebook in terms of democratization, in Myanmar Facebook has gone beyond the tool “to connect your friends and families” that Mark Zuckerberg envisioned:

“It is fascinating to see how Myanmar people are using Facebook in every possible way. So you can see small kids or youngsters using Facebook just to post selfies or to connect with all friends. You can see journalists always on Facebook trying to expound the news. We can see activists campaigning on Facebook which is really helpful also, and we can see the Minister using the Facebook too, you know, sometimes [to] talk [about] his vision or sometimes just to sell himself” (Aung, 2014, [annex 8.4](#)).

Facebook has also taken the place of blogs as a tool for activism, as Nay Phone Latt (2014, [annex 8.3.5](#)) explains: “When I was released from the prison in 2012, Facebook was more popular than blogs and most of the bloggers they shifted to Facebook”.

Organisations use Facebook for networking purposes as well as project coordination and management:

“Whenever we want to make networking, the first thing we have to do is to create a Facebook group, because most of the people are using Facebook, so it is very easy to communicate with each other” (Latt, 2014, [annex 8.3.5](#)).

Media take advantage of Facebook’s popularity for promoting their news: “Facebook gets a lot more hits than our website itself. It’s really, really vital to the *DVB Debate* project and *DVB* itself”, says Ali Fowle (2014, [annex 8.3.4](#)).

In addition, journalists use the social network to monitor news: “I always have an eye on Facebook. It seems like a more active research move to go and look at all the other websites”, argues Fowle (ibd.). The utility of Facebook as a newsfeed is recognized also by social media pioneers in Myanmar like Rita Nguyen (2014, [annex 8.3.6](#)) from MySQUAR: “Facebook is largely a newsfeed here in Myanmar and it does it very well”. Even Myanmar’s Deputy Minister of Information Ye Htut is known for his intense activity on Facebook⁴⁴: “He’ll update photos and information and [visiting his Facebook page] is one of the best ways to find information about the President and what’s going on [in Myanmar]” (Fowle, 2014, [annex 8.3.4](#)).

The variety of usage is a case of ‘reconfiguration’ of Facebook in Myanmar: “Users modify and adapt media technologies and systems as needed to suit their various purposes or interests” (Lievrouw, 2011, p.4). There are at least two reasons for this to happen: the first one is that the platform is user-friendly and easy to engage. The second one is that

⁴⁴ Ye Htut’s official Facebook Page in Myanmar: <https://www.facebook.com/ye.htut.988>

Facebook overcomes part of the technological barrier in Myanmar. “The interconnection with other Facebook users is very easy” compared to blogs that require an effort to have the audience visiting regularly, argues Nay Phone Latt (2014, [annex 8.3.5](#)). “The connectivity [of Facebook] is a huge advantage”, agrees Ali Fowle (2014, [annex 8.3.4](#)). “People go on one website and then they see related stories and all these clever, little links. You’re on Facebook and they suggest another similar website” (*ibd.*). The penetration of Facebook in Myanmar is so vast that some users enter the Internet exclusively to use Facebook. Actually, some consider that Facebook is the Internet, Htaike Htaike Aung (2014, [annex 8.4](#)) states:

“When we went to rural areas we could see that people were using Facebook, but then we were saying, ‘Hey, it’s not so bad, you are using the Internet’. But then they would say ‘I’m not using Internet, I’m just using Facebook’.”



Image 4. Facebook manual in Myanmar language sold in a bookstore in Yangon, February 2014 / Santi Mayor Farguell

6 CONCLUSIONS

This research analysed the role and potential of digital media in the current democratization process in Myanmar. Research questions were addressed with a discourse analysis and qualitative interviews, under a communication for development perspective. The research provided the following findings:

To the question ‘how do digital media phrase Myanmar beyond the country’s own media confines’, the author found confirmation that “the study of mass media and democratization is a moving target”, as argued by Jebril et al. (2013, p.33). The dynamic nature of democratization as a process “that always remains incomplete” (Tilly, 2007, p. xi) was reflected in the different ways President Barack Obama and President Thein Sein label the ongoing changes in Myanmar ([F1](#)).

Democratization in Myanmar is interpreted differently at the international/external level and the national/internal level. In the analysed digital media texts the democratization process in the country is phrased with few democracy indicators: eligibility granted to Aung San Suu Kyi at the 2015 general elections; release of political prisoners; and the end of ethnic/religious violence. Interviews conducted with stakeholders in Myanmar showed that concerns about democracy are more focused on freedom of speech (including the issue of hate speech spread through digital media), access to information, capacity building and empowerment.

The research also revealed a notable ambiguity in portraying Myanmar’s democratization in digital media, especially when it comes to the relation between political and economic reforms. The complexity of international relations demands prudence when raising conclusions. Still, the analysed discourses suggest that the cease of human rights violations requested by the international community as a key indicator for Myanmar’s progress in democratization was not made a prerequisite for foreign economic investment. Democratization therefore appears as a double tracked path where conditions (reforms) and consequences (investment) run in parallel, instead of consecutively.

Another finding of the discourse analysis is that President Thein Sein was little controversial compared to the level of criticism the Government of Myanmar and the Government of the United States receive. In digital media coverage, portraits of Thein Sein highlight his human qualities and successful leadership rather than his shortcomings.

Regarding the question ‘how do stakeholders in Myanmar use digital media for democratization’, this research found a variety of uses, such as outreach increase, posting and retrieval of content, audience engagement, education and capacity building. The study reveals that digital media are already being used for capacity building and education by local organisations that aim to empower the population, such as MIDO and the Scholar Institute.

The potential of digital media is acknowledged by all interviewed stakeholders, even by those who admit that connectivity issues impede the ability to unfold the full potential of

digital media for social change (e.g. referring to projects in rural areas that are not carried out due to the lack of connectivity and/or digital media literacy). The recent distribution of telecommunication licenses to the two international providers Telenor and Ooredoo raises high hopes among stakeholders in the improvement of connectivity, along with some concern about the Government's normative regulation.

Better connectivity and a higher Internet penetration rate could lead to a more efficient use of digital media, allowing for greater 'interactivity', which is a characteristic of digital media (Lievrouw, 2011, p.15) and an enabler of citizen participation⁴⁵.

A major finding of the research is the prominent role of Facebook in Myanmar beyond its original purpose of a social network "to stay connected with friends and family"⁴⁶. Facebook was originally used in 2011 as a substitute for blogging and as a way to avoid military censorship. Since then, the use of Facebook in Myanmar has broadened to posting and retrieval of information, amplification of outreach, coordination, newsfeed, capacity building, marketing and interactivity – to the point that some people believe that Facebook and Internet are synonyms. The phenomenon of Facebook's role in Myanmar can be described as 'reconfiguration' (Lievrouw, 2011, p.4) and offers an opportunity for further research.

On the question 'to what extent can digital media become a tool for democratization within a very limited connectivity context', the research found that it can do so only to a limited extent. A higher Internet penetration rate is needed for digital media to make a difference in terms of social change and democratization. However, stakeholders acknowledge certain improvements, such as the by-passing of censorship and broader access to information about Myanmar and the rest of the world. In addition, pioneer initiatives to promote social change and democratization through digital media are already taking place, such as attempts by *DVB Debate* to encourage a culture of "transparency, opinion and debate" (Fowle, [annex 8.3.4](#)), or the development of mobile applications to empower farmers by MySQUAR.

When asked about the main challenges of using digital media for democratization purposes in Myanmar, stakeholders expressed their concern about the spread of hate speech through digital media. The ongoing ethnic and religious conflict in the country makes digital media a battlefield for hate speech and counter-information practices. Hate speech benefits from many digital media's facilities to easily, anonymously and immediately spread content without undergoing editorial filters.

The scope of this study was deliberately wide, as little scientific information has been published yet on the recent transformation process in Myanmar and digital media's role in it. During the field work several opportunities for deepening the research subject

⁴⁵ According to Breuer (2012), "lack of social interaction" is "one of the central obstacles of collective action under authoritarianism" (p.25).

⁴⁶ Our Mission. (2014). *Facebook Newsroom*. Retrieved 30 May 2014 from <http://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/>

emerged. The role of Facebook, as mentioned above, is the most evident. Another topic worth studying is the transition of the roles of activists and bloggers in Myanmar from former political prisoners to capacity builders and advisers to the Government of Myanmar. The expected growing prevalence of smartphones and mobile technology will also provide opportunities for case studies, especially in the country's agricultural-based rural areas. From the perspective of cultural studies, it could be interesting to analyse the collision of cultural values in a deep-rooted Buddhist society with those attached to the economic dynamics of market opening and foreign investment.

To conclude, the author refers to a statement from Couldry (2012) that reflects the complexity of the chosen research: "Changes in the communication infrastructure we call 'media' have always resulted from the *intersections* between technological, economic, social and political forces" (p.13). Myanmar is a good example of this intersection and its ongoing dynamics.

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8 ANNEXES

8.1 TEXT FOR DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Topic: Myanmar's President Thein Sein visits US President Barack Obama in Washington, 20 May 2013.

8.1.1 Feature 1 (F1)

The White House. Office of the press secretary: remarks by President Obama and President Thein Sein of Myanmar after bilateral meeting

Date: 20 May 2013

Author: The White House. Office of the Press Secretary.

Source: YouTube⁴⁷; website of the Government of the USA⁴⁸; website of the Government of Myanmar⁴⁹.

Transcript:⁵⁰

PRESIDENT OBAMA: I want to welcome President Thein Sein to the United States of America and to the Oval Office.

Last year, I was proud to make a historic visit to Myanmar as the first U.S. President ever to visit that country. And now President Sein is able to return the favour by making a visit to the United States, and my understanding is that this is the first visit by a leader of Myanmar in almost 50 years.

Obviously, during this period in between there have been significant bilateral tensions between our countries. But what has allowed this shift in relations is the leadership that President Sein has shown in moving Myanmar down a path of both political and economic reform.

⁴⁷ President Obama's Bilateral Meeting with President Thein Sein of Myanmar. (2013, 21 May). *YouTube. The White House channel.* Retrieved 10 December 2013 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aILkTGb4NYM>

⁴⁸President Obama's Bilateral Meeting with President Thein Sein of Myanmar. (2013, 21 May). *Whitehouse.gov.* Retrieved 10 December 2013 from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/photos-and-video/video/2013/05/20/president-obamas-bilateral-meeting-president-thein-sein-myanmar#transcript>

⁴⁹ President Obama Bilateral Meeting With President Thein Sein. (2013, 21 May). *President-office.gov.mm.* Retrieved 10 December 2013 from <http://www.president-office.gov.mm/en/?q=media-room/video/id-2067>

⁵⁰ Remarks by President Obama and President Thein Sein of Myanmar After Bilateral Meeting. (2013, 20 May). *Whitehouse.gov.* Retrieved 10 December 2013 from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/05/20/remarks-president-obama-and-president-thein-sein-myanmar-after-bilateral>

Over the last two years, we've seen a steady process in which political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi, have been released and have been incorporated into the political process.

We've seen credible elections and a legislature that is continuing to make strides in the direction of more inclusivity and greater representation of all the various groups within Myanmar.

President Sein has also made genuine efforts to resolve longstanding ethnic conflicts within the country, and has recognized the need to establish laws that respect the rights of the people of Myanmar.

As a consequence of these changes in policy inside of Myanmar, the United States has been able to relax sanctions that had been placed on Myanmar, and many countries around the world have followed suit.

And this has also allowed the United States and other countries and international institutions to participate in engagement with the Myanmar government about how we can be helpful in spurring economic development that is broad-based and that produces concrete results for the people of Myanmar. And that includes the prospect of increasing trade and investment in Myanmar, which can produce jobs and higher standards of living.

But as President Sein is the first to admit, this is a long journey and there is still much work to be done. And during our discussions, President Sein shared with me the fact -- the manner in which he intends to continue to move forward on releasing more political prisoners; making sure that the government of Myanmar institutionalizes some of the political reforms that have already taken place; how rule of law is codified so that it continues into the future; and the process whereby these ethnic conflicts that have existed are resolved not simply by a ceasefire but an actual incorporation of all these communities into the political process.

I also shared with President Sein our deep concern about communal violence that has been directed at Muslim communities inside of Myanmar. The displacement of people, the violence directed towards them needs to stop, and we are prepared to work in any ways that we can with both the government of Myanmar and the international community to assure that people are getting the help that they need but, more importantly, that their rights and their dignity is recognized over the long term.

As I indicated to President Sein, countries that are successful are countries that tap into the talents of all people and respect the rights of all people. And I'm confident that if Myanmar follows that recipe, that it will be not only a successful democracy but also a thriving economy.

We also discussed some very concrete projects that we've already initiated. For example, USAID is already working to evaluate how we can improve agricultural productivity in Myanmar that can benefit farmers, increase incomes, and improve standards of living in a largely agricultural country.

And we're also working, for example, on projects like improving the road that currently exists between Rangoon and Mandalay.

Finally, I want to thank President Sein for his participation in ASEAN and the East Asia Summit in which the United States is actively engaged in, all the countries in Southeast Asia, as part of our broader refocusing on the Asia Pacific region -- a region of enormous growth and potential with which we want to continue to strengthen our bonds.

So, Mr. President, welcome to the United States of America. We very much appreciate your efforts and leadership in leading Myanmar in a new direction, and we want you to know that the United States will make every effort to assist you on what I know is a long, and sometimes difficult, but ultimately correct path to follow.

PRESIDENT SEIN: (As interpreted.) I would like to express my sincere thanks to President Obama for inviting me to come to the United States. Indeed, this is my very first visit to Washington, D.C., as well as to the White House.

And I am also very pleased to have this opportunity to discuss about the democratization process and reform process undertaken in my country.

Our two countries established diplomatic relations since 1947, a year before our independence. And since then we have been able to enjoy -- historically, our two countries have enjoyed cordial relations, and there were also exchange of -- high-level exchange of visit between our two countries.

But I have to say that in the past there were difficulties in our bilateral relationship. But now we are very pleased that our relations have been improved significantly, and I am very thankful that in 50 years I am repaying a visit to the United States at the invitation of President Obama. And I am very grateful for extending an invitation to me to pay a visit to the United States.

Now that our country, Myanmar, has started to practice democratic system, so we can say that we have -- both our countries have similar political system in our two countries.

As you all know, our government is just -- our democratic government is just two years old. And we have -- within the short period of two years, our government has carried out political and economic reforms in our country. Because we are in a very nascent stage of democratic -- a democratic stage, we still need a lot of democratic experience and practices to be learned. And we have seen successes. At the same time, we have been encountering obstacle and challenges along our democratization process -- path.

The improvement in our relation is also in recognition -- U.S. government's recognition of our democratization efforts and our genuine efforts for democratization process in our country. And it is also due to -- thanks to President Obama's reengagement policy to reengage with our country so that we have seen improvement in our bilateral relation within a short period of time.

Myanmar, being a developing country, and as we are undertaking changes of our democratization reforms, it is a daunting task ahead of us. We encounter many challenges, such as the present -- our poverty rate in the country is quite high and we have very few job opportunity, and then as well as we have a -- we do not have much middle class in our country. And then we -- our people needs to be all familiar with democratic practice, democratic norms and values.

So we have a lot of challenges ahead of us, but we have to -- thanks to the U.S. government and the people support them for understanding that we will be able to encounter these challenges as we undertake the reform process in our country.

During my meeting with -- our discussion with President, as he has already elaborated, we discussed about the rule of law in our country; the strengthening of judicial bodies; the providing assistance so that our police and military force become professional forces. And then to reiterate, we also discussed what related to the poverty alleviation for the rural people and farmers, agriculture, development, as well as how uplifting the health and education sectors of our countries.

So we had a very fruitful discussion with President Obama, and then I must say that I am very pleased to have this opportunity to have a candid and frank discussion with President Obama. And I believe that I have my visit to the United States is quite successful and meaningful.

So for democracy to flourish in our country, we will have to move forward and we will have to undertake reforms -- political reforms and economic reforms in the years ahead. We will also have to -- we are trying our best with our own efforts to have political and economic reforms in our country. But we will also need -- along this path, we will also need the assistance and understanding from the international community, including the United States.

And what I want to say is that President Obama has frequently used the word "forward." And I will take this opportunity to reiterate that Myanmar and I will continue to take the forward -- move forward so that we will have -- we can build a new democratic state -- a new Myanmar, a new democratic state in our country.

I thank you all.

8.1.2 Feature 2 (F2)

AFP: "US looks to end Myanmar sanctions after landmark visit"

Date: 21 May 2013

Author: Shaun Tandon / *AFP*

Source: Factiva

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A key US senator on Tuesday backed an end to US sanctions on Myanmar after a landmark visit by the country's reformist leader, signaling a new normalization in relations despite rights concerns.

President Thein Sein, a general-turned-civilian who ended Myanmar's long isolation from the West, met lawmakers at the US Capitol one day after the first White House summit by a leader of his country in nearly 50 years.

Senator Mitch McConnell, who has spearheaded sanctions for the past decade over human rights concerns, said he would not support a renewal of the measures that banned a range of imports from the country formerly known as Burma.

"I believe renewing sanctions would be a slap in the face to Burmese reformers and embolden those within Burma who want to slow or reverse reform," McConnell, the Senate Republican leader, said after meeting Thein Sein.

President Barack Obama has already waived most sanctions on Myanmar but Congress has kept the laws on the books, hoping that the threat of reimposing the restrictions would motivate the government to address concerns.

McConnell, who said he gave the issue "a great deal of thought," said that a ban on gems -- a key revenue source for the junta -- would remain and that the end of sanctions would put US firms on the same level a Europe and Australia.

But Thein Sein also met separately with four House members from President Barack Obama's Democratic Party, who handed him a list of nearly 250 inmates allegedly jailed for political reasons and urged an end to ethnic violence.

The prisoners "deserve the opportunity to participate in the future of the country, and we believe they should be released immediately and unconditionally," the lawmakers said in a letter handed to Thein Sein.

The lawmakers included former speaker Nancy Pelosi and Joe Crowley, who has reintroduced a sanctions bill in the House.

Thein Sein has released hundreds of political prisoners since taking office in 2011. He has also eased censorship, opened talks with rebels and allowed long-detained opposition icon Aung San Suu Kyi to serve in parliament.

Adding to the historic symbolism of the visit, the leader of the nation formerly known as Burma took a short side trip to tour the Mount Vernon estate of US general-turned-first-president George Washington.

The United States and Myanmar on Tuesday also signed an accord to formalize dialogue on trade, a day after Thein Sein surprised US business leaders by making a pitch in good English for investment in poor but growing Myanmar.

Derek Mitchell, the US ambassador to Myanmar, hailed Thein Sein's reforms as having "captured the imagination of Americans" but said that his visit was not the end.

"Beyond the euphoria of new hope and rising expectations is the reality of the hard work to come," Mitchell told a dinner in Thein Sein's honor at the US Chamber of Commerce.

"I know of no one in your government -- or mine -- who is declaring victory as if the future course of your country is clear and inevitable," Mitchell said.

Critics say Obama's invitation to Thein Sein left few US incentives to offer in return for action on other concerns, including addressing anti-Muslim violence to which security forces were accused of turning a blind eye or worse.

The most important test will come in 2015 when Myanmar is scheduled to hold elections, meaning that the military may have to decide whether it will truly cede power for the first time since seizing control in 1962.

Thein Sein, who had served as premier under the former junta, was asked repeatedly in Washington about the military and defended the armed forces as playing a critical role.

Walter Lohman, director of the Asian Studies Center at the conservative Heritage Foundation, said the Obama administration appeared to be moving from a policy of maintaining leverage on Myanmar to one of supporting Thein Sein.

"I don't know that our assistance or support for him is really going to help him, but I think it does potentially send the wrong signal back to people in Burma who are still struggling," Lohman said.

"If we get to 2015 and (a free election) doesn't happen, we will have been wrong about all this," he said.

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8.1.3 Feature 3 (F3)

The Myanmar Times: "Obama urges action on ethnic conflict"

Date: 21 May 2013

Author: *The Myanmar Times / AFP*

Source: <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/6849-obama-urges-action-on-ethnic-conflict.html>

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US President Barack Obama on Monday threw his support behind Myanmar President Thein Sein in his drive to reform a former pariah state but warned that a wave of violence against Muslims must stop.

As his guest became the first leader of his country in almost 50 years to visit the White House, Obama praised Myanmar's journey away from brutal junta rule and promised Washington would offer more political and economic support.

Obama said that once tortured US-Myanmar relations had eased because of "the leadership that President Sein has shown in moving Myanmar down a path of both political and economic reform."

Obama repeatedly used the word "Myanmar" rather than Burma. The former is the name introduced during military rule, and which is slowly being used more frequently by US officials as a courtesy to the reforming government.

The US president said that Thein Sein had made "genuine efforts" to solve the intricate ethnic wars that have long torn at Myanmar's unity, but expressed "deep concern" on the plight of Rohingya Muslim minority.

"The displacement of people, the violence directed towards them, needs to stop," Obama said.

The visit went ahead despite accusations by human rights groups that Myanmar authorities turned a blind eye or worse to a wave of deadly attacks against the Rohingya, who are not even considered citizens.

Thein Sein told Obama that he was committed to reforms and, in a speech shortly afterward, said he wanted to build a "more inclusive national identity."

"Myanmar people of all ethnic backgrounds and all faiths -- Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, Hindus and others -- must feel part of this new national identity," he said, while stopping short of directly mentioning the Rohingya.

"We must end all forms of discrimination and ensure not only that intercommunal violence is brought to a halt, but that all perpetrators are brought to justice," he said at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies.

Thein Sein, who took office as a nominal civilian in 2011, said that the reforms he has undertaken were "unprecedented" and called for "maximum international support."

"Periods of transition are always fraught with risk. But I know my country and my people," he said.

"I know how much people want to see democracy take root, put behind decades of isolation, catch up with other Asian economies and end all violence and fighting," he said.

Thein Sein surprised even cynics by freeing hundreds of political prisoners, reaching ceasefires with ethnic rebel groups, easing censorship and letting long-detained opposition icon Aung San Suu Kyi enter parliament.

The most critical test of reform will come in 2015, when Myanmar is scheduled to hold elections -- testing whether the military would truly cede power and potentially let Nobel laureate Suu Kyi become president.

The military seized power in 1962 under junta leader Ne Win, who in 1966 was the last leader of the country to visit the White House. He met president Lyndon Johnson as the Vietnam War raged.

Thein Sein spoke only obliquely of his motivation for reform. Many experts believe that the proudly independent nation feared that its isolation had pushed it too far into the orbit of China.

Thein Sein addressed a formal dinner later Monday with US business leaders. Reading a speech in solid English after a day speaking Burmese, the president billed Myanmar as a gateway to the lucrative markets of China and India.

"We would like to leave the foundation for a robust middle class. For that to happen, we would like to invite American companies to come and invest," he said, promising greater transparency as well as protections for workers.

The Obama administration has already suspended most sanctions on Myanmar and on Tuesday will sign an agreement for greater dialogue on trade, hoping to show the country tangible benefits for embracing reform.

Obama paid a first-ever US presidential visit to Myanmar in November. To some, Myanmar represents the biggest success from his pledge in his 2009 inaugural address to reach out to US foes if they "unclench" their fists.

Senator Marco Rubio of Florida, seen as a rising star in the rival Republican Party, accused Obama of moving too quickly on normalization with Myanmar, saying "the jury is still out" on reform.

"When rewards continue absent progress, it undermines the ultimate success of the effort and sends the wrong message to the Burmese people about American intentions," Rubio said.

8.1.4 Feature 4 (F4)

DVB: (Analysis) “Checkmate: Burma-US Policy”

Date: 20 May 2013

Author: Brianna Oliver

Source: <https://www.dvb.no/analysis/checkmate-burma-us-policy/28306>

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It goes without saying that there are winners and losers in Burma, a country ridden with decades-long civil wars and egregious human rights abuses under the iron-fist rule of the military junta. Under such conditions, United States policy towards Burma was guided by concerns for the majority of civilians who suffered greatly.

Despite these conditions persisting today, from atrocious anti-democratic laws to heinous war crimes, one sweeping by-election in April 2012 changed the game for Burma – Aung San Suu Kyi was elected to parliament and the US hasn’t looked back since.

On Monday, President Thein Sein, former junta leader turned President, will meet with President Obama in Washington DC. President Obama’s invitation demonstrates the dismal backsliding the US has taken with its Burma policy over the last year leading up to this moment.

What has taken place is a dramatic shift in US-Burma policy. Rather than a measured action-for-action policy, an encourage-the-reformers-only policy has taken its place. Why? An opportunity for fiscal, capital gains. Abandoning stipulations that all political prisoners be released immediately and unconditionally, ending all human rights abuses and genuine engagement through dialogue between military, democratic opposition and ethnic minorities for the sake of national reconciliation, the international gold rush opened by the NLD-swept by-elections determined that the US throw in the towel and join the race for investment in Burma.

In March 2013, US Campaign for Burma (USCB) travelled to Burma for three weeks, meeting with Rangoon-based civil society and ethnic political leaders, Thai-Burmese border based organisations and visiting IDPs and Kachin leaders in KIA territory in Kachin state. It became quite clear that there has been a significant shift in Burma as well, but make no mistake in believing it is positive, despite what the Obama administration would have you believe.

Where once the international community stood for the voiceless in Burma, political players are now selling out for investment, and because of this, ethnic minorities, civil society groups and farmers now feel abandoned and betrayed. Nearly 100,000 Kachin IDPs have yet to receive a penny in aid from the US. The ongoing war in Kachin state and the renewed conflict in Shan state demonstrate just how far the “ceasefire agreements” extend.

Land grabs in the name of investment that the US has cheerfully sold out for leave thousands with no place to go and no income to be made. Hundreds of new, unaccounted political prisoners jailed and tortured under ridiculous language of “unlawful association” and ethnic minorities, more notably of late the Rohingya Muslims, subject to ethnic cleansing, continue to succumb to the atrocious human rights abuses that for so long made Burma notorious.

These persisting abuses include: rape and sexual violence as a mechanism of war, forced labour, use of child soldiers, land grabbing without compensation, extrajudicial killings, murder, disappearances, impunity, labour and sex trafficking, and torture.

For the few Burmese civilians not falling under these categories though, international engagement on a surface level is invited because, like all countries emerging from brutal, repressive rule, opportunities to improve livelihoods and engage internationally are desired. Not only is the incredible disparity between the military-led government and Burma’s civilian population maintained, but now there is an immense distinction between civilians in Burma – those who can afford to turn a blind eye to the atrocities, and those who simply cannot escape them.

Clearly little reform was needed to convince the international community that Burma deserves to be welcomed into the global economy with open arms. One victorious by-election, a few quick-fixes to the government, a couple of commissioned committees handing out disgustingly slanted views, most recently the Latpadaung crackdown and Arakan state violence reports, and mere face-time peace talks between Aung Min and armed ethnic groups is enough for the US to drop nearly all sanctions, President Obama to visit Burma in November 2012, and now Thein Sein to visit the White House.

The Burmese government has been shrewd with their public rhetoric in making the world believe Burma is on the path toward freedom and democracy for all. We saw first-hand that not only has nothing changed for many, but in fact getting much worse for ethnic minorities.

The Obama administration is ignoring human rights while courting investment opportunities and political favour. This strategy strongly favours economic benefits for the military and their crony partners, while farmers lose their land and human rights abuses continue unabated.

Brianna Oliver is the communications & development coordinator at US Campaign for Burma

(The opinions and views expressed in this piece are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect DVB's editorial policy)

8.1.5 Feature 5 (F5)

NYTimes.com: (Opinion) “What Obama Needs to Tell Myanmar’s Leader”

Date: 20 May 2013

Author: José Ramos-Horta, Muhammad Yunus and Benedict Rogers

Source: <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/21/opinion/global/what-obama-needs-to-tell-myansmars-leader.html? r=0>

© 2013 The New York Times Company

President Thein Sein of Myanmar is in Washington this week, the first Burmese head of state to visit since the military dictator Gen. Ne Win in 1966.

Much has changed since 1966. Fifty years of direct military rule have ended, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi is out of house arrest and sits in Parliament, along with 42 of her colleagues from the National League for Democracy, and hundreds of political prisoners — including the most prominent dissidents — have been released.

Preliminary, fragile cease-fires have been reached with most ethnic armed resistance groups, and in Yangon and other major cities there is greater space for civil society, more freedom for the media and more opportunity for political actors. The first steps toward freedom are being taken.

When dictators unclench their fists, they should be met with an outstretched hand. The international community is right to bring Myanmar in from the cold, to engage reformers and to support the process of democratization with expertise and encouragement.

However, engagement should not be uncritical or unthinking. Myanmar is just starting out on a path of reform, and there is a very, very long way to go.

The political changes under way mark a change of atmosphere, but not yet a change of system. President Obama must encourage Thein Sein to go further, to engage in serious constitutional and legislative reform.

Repressive laws remain on the books, and are still used to lock people up. There remain several hundred political prisoners and hundreds have been jailed during ethnic and religious conflicts in Kachin and Arakan states. The Constitution still disqualifies Aung San Suu Kyi from the presidency and guarantees the military a quarter of parliamentary seats. The military's role in politics may be reduced gradually, as in Indonesia, but if Aung San Suu Kyi is to be eligible for the presidency after the next election in 2015, the Constitution needs to be amended soon.

The cease-fires are welcome, but amount only to pressing the pause button on conflict. Thein Sein must press the stop button by establishing a genuine nationwide peace process with the country's ethnic nationalities to search for a political solution to decades of civil war. The ethnic nationalities are united in their desire for a federal system of government, guaranteeing equal rights and a degree of autonomy. Aung San Suu Kyi supports this.

Myanmar's ethnic nationalities collectively amount to 40 percent of the population and inhabit 60 percent of the land. They live along Myanmar's borders in some of the most resource-rich areas and along the major trade routes. It is therefore in the government's interest, and that of the international community, to find a genuine solution to the ethnic conflicts. International investors will want to see peace and stability.

In addition to turning existing cease-fires into a lasting peace, Thein Sein must end the army's offensive against the Kachin people. Two years ago the military launched a new campaign against the Kachin, ending a 17-year cease-fire. Since then, over 100,000 Kachin civilians have been displaced, at least 200 villages burned down and 66 churches destroyed.

Grave human rights violations continue, including rape, torture and killings. If Myanmar is really on the path of change, the government must end these abuses and tackle the culture of impunity that has existed for so long.

There are two other major challenges Thein Sein must address. The first is the plight of the Muslim Rohingyas, one of the most marginalized people in the world. Their history is disputed, but no one can truthfully deny that they have lived in Myanmar for generations. Yet the government, and many in Burmese society, claim they are all "illegal Bengali immigrants."

This view is based on years of misinformation and propaganda. The Rohingyas were recognized until the 1982 Citizenship Law stripped them of their citizenship and rendered them stateless. Since then, they have faced a slow-burning campaign of persecution, which exploded last June and again in October, resulting in the deaths of at least 1,000 and the displacement of at least 130,000.

Human Rights Watch has published evidence of mass graves and a campaign of ethnic cleansing. Evidence shows that the security forces have done nothing to prevent this and, in many instances, have been complicit in the violence.

Earlier this year, the anti-Rohingya campaign turned into a wider anti-Muslim campaign, with appalling violence by Buddhists against Muslims in Meikhtila and other parts of Myanmar. There are deep-seated prejudices within Burmese society that need to be addressed, but there are also concerns that elements of the security forces may be stoking the flames. At the very least, the security forces have been grossly negligent, failing to intervene quickly and in some cases standing by as people were hacked to death and buildings burned.

In his discussions with Thein Sein, President Obama has a long list of issues to raise. If democracy is to take root, he must emphasize an end to ethnic and religious conflict and respect for human rights. These can only be achieved by a concerted and sincere effort by Thein Sein's government.

If Thein Sein's government makes this effort, its already heralded path of reform has a good chance of success and President Obama's policy of engagement will be proven right.

We urge Thein Sein to prove the cynics wrong and we urge President Obama to leave the Burmese leader in no doubt as to what the international community expects of him.

José Ramos-Horta is former president of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, and 1996 Nobel Peace Prize laureate. **Muhammad Yunus** is founder and former managing director of Grameen Bank and 2006 Nobel Peace Prize laureate. **Benedict Rogers** is a human rights advocate with Christian Solidarity Worldwide, and author of “*Burma: A Nation at the Crossroads*.”

8.2 SEMI-STRUCTURED QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS: QUESTIONNAIRE

A. Use of digital media

How does the use of digital media help (your organisation) pursue its mission/goals?

Can you give some examples of how (you/your organisation) use(s) digital media to pursue your/its mission and goals?

What are digital media used for in (your organisation)?

What type of digital media does (your organisation) use more frequently, and what for?

What is the advantage to (you/your organisation) of using digital media?

B. Case study for discourse analysis

On 20 May 2013 Thein Sein visited Barack Obama in Washington. What type of media do you recall collecting information/opinion about that specific event?

Regarding the previous question, would you consider that the existence of digital media made any difference in the way you collected information/opinion on that event?

C. Social change

How are digital media enhancing democratization / social change in Myanmar?

What is the potential of digital media as a communication-for-social-change tool?

What challenges may the digital media imply in the democratization of Myanmar?

8.3 SEMI-STRUCTURED QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS: TRANSCRIPTS

8.3.1 Tim McLaughlin

Position: *The Myanmar Times* Senior Reporter

Date: 20 February 2014

Location: *The Myanmar Times* office, Yangon

A. Use of digital media

Interviewer: How does the use of digital media help *The Myanmar Times* pursue its mission/goals?

Tim McLaughlin: It helps in getting news to more people outside Myanmar and people who aren't going to be able to buy the newspaper on a daily basis or weekly basis. Obviously, they don't buy the paper editions. So they'll be able to access it online.

Interviewer: Can you give some examples of how *The Myanmar Times* uses digital media to pursue your/its mission and goals?

Tim McLaughlin: It uses it every day, just trying to keep the website updated. It's not always getting our information out there and stories out there. It's also the competition. There are other news outlets here, now both domestically and internationally are growing. So there is also the need to keep up with them and compete with them in getting these sorts of measures.

Interviewer: What about Facebook?

Tim McLaughlin: It seems people can speak in there more like in a personal way where there can be comments, they can share and they can see what will come up. It seems to be a much more interacting experience. People are particularly able to voice their opinion and leave feedback on what they think we are doing right or wrong (generally seems to be wrong). But I think that's part of the reason why it's such a popular avenue that is accepted in this country.

Interviewer: What are digital media used for in *The Myanmar Times*?

Tim McLaughlin: I think mostly posting information. Obviously some people read things and they want to write opinions. So they contact us through Facebook or through

Twitter. All the kind of stuff that comes along with using them, which is one of the advantages, which is positive.

Interviewer: What type of digital media does *The Myanmar Times* use more frequently, and what for?

Tim McLaughlin: I think primarily people are probably using reports that are published from NGOs or academic sources, press releases when it comes to certain things that are going on, I think probably more on a business side of things, especially with foreign corporations who might not be in the country and might not have press conferences. (...) Those are ways that we gather information through digital media. We are subscribed to AP newswire. If you see the newspaper we print, there are wired stories. We also use *The Washington Post* and *Bloomberg*. They primarily use those stories in the *Art & Culture* section and also in the *Travel* section, kind of like long form essay, travel sort of stuff that won't quite fit in the news areas.

Interviewer: What about video wires?

Tim McLaughlin: Video, we don't really use much now; the new website that we are launching should be able to handle more of it. Right now the site is not pretty updated, to be honest, and also I think primarily audiences for video would be kind of outside the country because it takes time to download multi-platform content, and if you are uploading, it is also difficult. It can work for organizations and groups like *DVB*. They have options to go live which allows them to kind of set this up and then get it off on the website quickly and also running quickly, whereas trying to do it internally, I think, would pose the problem. That will change in the future.

B. Case study for discourse analysis

Interviewer: On 20 May 2013 Thein Sein visited Barack Obama in Washington. What type of media do you recall collecting information/opinion about that specific event?

Tim McLaughlin: I mean for that because it's a place outside the county, I would guess in our publication that we probably use maybe a wired story and primarily like the news that we ran because AP obviously has reporters in Washington. But also, in those sorts of situations, government website with US entity for what would be kind of a key point

information, I think the details of the trip, obviously not the colors and the clothing stuff, but like who he is attempting to meet with, who he's met with... And also a very important source, I think people kind of forget about because it's quite ridiculous, is the *New Light of Myanmar*, the newspaper. It is tremendously important, having so many facts every day, who is meeting with who. (...) With that, we have a lot of the names, dates, like that from the state media. And then news wires and since we don't have the capability of putting reporters there, in that case, it's not so much kind of doing the reporting, as if interviewing Obama, Thein Sein...

Interviewer: Regarding the previous question, would you consider that the existence of digital media made any difference in the way you collected information/opinion on that event?

Tim McLaughlin: Yeah, absolutely, I mean there always have been – I don't know how we would have done it without statements released from the White House or from the state department via the Internet without the digital format. I don't know how you'd go about – you'd have to be there or have someone to be there for passing new information along. So yeah, absolutely, I mean it is kind of crucial.

C. Social change

Interviewer: How are digital media enhancing democratization / social change in Myanmar?

Tim McLaughlin: It would be more in the news getting out there. I think digital media, the speed of transmission and the amount of people that you can reach here have really transformed things, in maybe in a year-and-a-half time absolutely and it was important as well because of hundreds of censorship, the pre-printing censorship, you kind of revert those on Facebook or on social media sites. (...) A lot of people because it's so cheap are using Internet on their phones when they are sitting in the Internet cafes or using laptops. So taking into account that which is where a lot of people are kind of accessing these stories, I think that the reach of the Internet and the reach of digital media is probably bigger than people in the outside looking in would think – as they look at undeveloped countries, they look at lower Internet penetration rates, they go "oh, nobody is reading that online", and then last week I was on a restaurant I saw on every table, every single

person had smartphones and they were using the 3G network, maybe not the Internet, but the 3G network. So I think the strength of it is larger than people think.

Interviewer: Can you give an example of a current use of digital media that would not have been possible one year and a half ago?

Tim McLaughlin: Any sort of stuff that we'd have reads in the newspaper before it went online, it would have been censored before a year-and-a-half ago. So now having those articles online that are uncensored, obviously makes a huge difference in reporting kind of what's going on. And then also, I just think the awareness of local newspapers and their recognition that they need to be online to succeed, and they can make an outside impact by putting their information online. I think there is a tremendous recognition here that that needs to happen.

Interviewer: What is the potential of digital media as a communication-for-social-change tool?

Tim McLaughlin: I think it's big here, You see a lot of rumors getting circulated on social media, digital media at the moment, not through media outlets, maybe through just sort of people in groups, putting out certain rumors or photos and things like that. You know I think if you look at that, you'd say, oh, if we can make something go viral or get a tremendous following that was a really good message, then yeah, I think there is tremendous potential.

(...) I think we saw with the – when *Time Magazine* ran the cover *The Face of Buddhist Terror*, the Government of Myanmar banned the author, and the feature of *Time Magazine* got overnight thousands and thousands and thousands of followers and some of them not even in Myanmar. So I mean if we could use that and put out our message, and gain a quick following, there would be a tremendous potential in a lot of ways, not just for an abuse, but marketing or any other kind of perspective.

Interviewer: What challenges may the digital media imply in the democratization of Myanmar?

Tim McLaughlin: I think the challenge is obviously the Electronic Transaction Law and those kind of laws would be issues that need to be looked at. (...) And then I guess there's a risk of a certain... I think with the website...If you are on the company's website or

media outlet website, there is always the feeling that you are getting the real information, but on social media, it seems like there is this kind of discredit, organizations are discredited with the larger media landscape as a whole which I think is a real fear for people working in the industry. (...) So I think it's a matter of companies like *The Myanmar Times*, small journals, more effectively putting on their information and kind of protecting it from that kind of stuff happening.

8.3.2 Suleman Malik

Position: C4D Specialist UNICEF Myanmar

Date: 20 February 2014

Location: UNICEF office, Yangon

A. Use of digital media

Interviewer: How does the use of digital media help UNICEF pursue its mission/goals?

Suleman Malik: Communication for development deals with the attitudes, knowledge and practices, and it helps programs, across all programs to achieve objectives through a change in behavior and society. (...) If you do any analysis on midterm or immediate term strategic objectives, if you go to any country level objectives and you review it, you will find that certain parts of those objectives are related to utilization. You cannot assume that utilization will happen automatically unless there are very strategic inputs into that process. (...)

We use all kind of media and, in fact, we create new media. In different countries, in different scenarios and societies, we create our own media. Within digital media, if you allow me, I will start with radio. Radio is a mainstream digital media in Myanmar, right now we have six different radio stations in Myanmar. All the radio stations, six radio stations in Myanmar. We also are in talks with the Ministry of Health, and we made a partnership based on that experience and hard evidence, and our belief is that this partnership is really critical and we want the corporate media, and especially with FM stations, and in Myanmar our evidence is very clear. Almost 42% population listens to radio stations, so we approach them and they responded very, very positively.

Then we come to Internet. UNICEF is one of the very few organizations which has invested a lot in terms of social media networking. But in Myanmar there is not solid

Internet access, hence so far we have used the UNICEF website. And UNICEF website also has all programs related information and also about communication for services. People who are interested, they can go to that, they will come back to us, and we will communicate using this Internet based communication also and that is what really comes out of corporate image and also what we are trying to do and within that there is also possibility of two-way communication.

Number three is the mobile phones. We came up with an initiative last year called ‘Messaging Life’, and ‘Messaging Life’ was expected to engage different segments of the society to work through mobile phones and have a two-way communication with them around different points.

Interviewer: What information or data does UNICEF recall having accessed primarily on digital media?

Suleman Malik: Our focus is only primarily on the scope for child education, child's protection and watch. This information is very considerate to our participating parties. People we are trying to reach out, they also have these issues, so what we bring in as a solution to those issues... Our content and our information is normally very much community oriented and community driven content and information and it was actually – in my experience commonly in Myanmar's rural community is very choosy and very, very close. What I have seen is that rural people, they lack right information and when they get to knowledge, they are ready to use out knowledge to change.

The journey between the knowledge to behavior change and all those steps of behavior change, in Myanmar comparatively people dig in very quickly as compared to other countries. That's very interesting. If you tell people that immunization is good, get your children immunized, and this is the time to come, people will come. People will not question and people will not argue and will not resist. Even interestingly, our recent studies found that many people are getting the children vaccine but they don't know what the benefit is. It also shows a very interesting societal trend, that people still do things that they are not fully sure, but they are told that it is good, but they personally don't know the rationale or name of the diseases.

So wherever we are taking it, it's helping except that when the overall societal norms or cultures... if there is a clash between your suggested behavior and local tradition, then it's very difficult. But if there is no clash between the local culture and the promoted

behavior, then it's very easy, the behavior change is, if there is no cultural barrier to it. If there is a culture clash, then it is not.

Interviewer: What is the advantage to UNICEF of using digital media?

Suleman Malik: Every media has its own strengths and its own limitations. When we plan a communication response, we see – we choose media due fairly to – nature of issue, nature of behavior. If we are going to do a polio campaign in ten townships of Rakhine State we will not be choosing all the digital media. We also see the reach of print media. We also see the nature of that campaign, if it's national, it is state, if it is townships. So there are certain factors which help us to make a decision to choose a certain media. Once we choose the media, then we will also see a combination. The behavior change is always a combination of different media.

Certain media has just conveyed information, another part of media is to bring credibility to your message, another part is to bring endorsement to your message, and another part is to bring some more authority to behavior. So it's always a mix, within the mix, you see who is in the background. For example, if we are talking about the – let's say, exclusive breast feeding, it's an expert thing, someone within the community; an expert in a community environment is a basic step because an expert is acute because she knows about exclusive breast feeding, what are the benefits of exclusive breast feeding, how it helps baby and mom, and also the expert is empowered and knows how to communicate. That is our new intervention. When people listen to it face to face, they are more inclined towards change. Now when media comes in, media also gives endorsement of what UNICEF is saying. And media also primarily endorse the message that we have started, so there comes the endorsement, that extra clarification and suggestion is coming face to face.

If we are doing a certain media campaign which has a duration of one week, then radio and digital media play an important role. We have to give information that there is going to be this campaign from this date to that date and in which townships and what to do there. So that information is then information digital media helps a lot. So you decide strategically based on your programming, your geographical focus, and the nature of the message.

Interviewer: Digital media are potentially very useful.

Suleman Malik: Yes, overall yes. I would say that this is more a – how strategically and intelligently you will use the media. You cannot make media as a lecture of health education. That, people also use it. They just record some lectures and then they hear the lectures. That's also a use. But if you know exactly what you want to do and you know how you want to do, then you use media. It's more strategic use of digital media, it's totally different. I mean if you are addressing only mothers, and mothers who have mothers, there are urban mothers and there are rural mothers, those who are sitting at home or working into field. So you also think of all those elements in society to use this digital media.

B. Case study for discourse analysis

Interviewer: On 20 May 2013 Thein Sein visited Barack Obama in Washington. What type of media do you recall collecting information/opinion about that specific event?

Suleman Malik: My focus is on child health...

C. Social change

Interviewer: How are digital media enhancing democratization / social change in Myanmar?

Suleman Malik: Digital media has a very important role in social change. The society changes for a period of time, and society changes as a part of certain interventions and certain flow of information and communication. In rural education, we see a social change in the last 30 years in Myanmar, related to educating girls. Within this, definitely there are many other factors which also contribute. There are economic factors, there are social factors, at the same time media also is a factor.

Media brings in the information which gives you new ideas. Media brings in the information which encourages you and persuades you when you are in the process of change, and media comes in at a time when you are beginning to see, and they are appreciating it and they are recognizing it, so media plays several roles in the social change.

Number one, media brings new perspectives and new opinions (...). When you bring a new information, it means that you are also trying to bring another perspective as compared to what is currently being practiced and being known and being seen. Maybe within that information we are also challenging those prevailing perspectives.

Secondly, when you are bound to change, you need some endorsement and some kind of encouragement. Media also brings that, and that exactly helps a lot at the time when you are bound to change. So in this whole behavior change when you and me decide and all other people in the room, they decide e.g. they have to wash hands, and media is encouraging that, it's also going to work.

And another very interesting thing is – and this is ideal change, the change takes place if you do something once, and you change from one previous thing to one new thing. Once you move to a certain change, for example, as a parent, you decide that your children should go to school, and then this whole thing – you start it when you have first child, you continue with second child, but your third and fourth child and other child in your neighborhood also get some support from you and you talk to your friend and neighbor and tell them and persuade them to send their children also to school. Media also has a role into you taking a position and sustaining that position.

Interviewer: What challenges may the digital media imply in the democratization of Myanmar?

Suleman Malik: I think there are two level of challenges. One challenge is that it is economically viable, and economically viable also means that you have all those freedom to start off, you have all those freedom to mobilize funds for it, you have all the freedom and opportunities to run it economically successful. Then I think still there are some areas with this transitional phase. I think some improvement is needed.

Second is around overall capacity and the context. If you see all six FM radio stations, overall their content is the same. It is some songs, some discussions, and some entertainment. By and large, the content of six are the same, their music, they are also talking and their data coverage. There are definitely different voices, but there is no uniqueness in that, and I link it to capacity. Still there aren't many radio stations as compared to many other countries, but in terms of capacity in these four years, I think people – we need a lot of effort about capacity building.

If you are a radio station and I am radio station and if we are competing, we really need to bring something very special for our audience. So that kind of competition is there. But still in terms of content, if I switch over from this radio station to another one, I don't find something very special. So what I am saying is about that capacity to bring something special, to do new experiments, and to have good ideas about issues and then roll about those. I think with this whole transition people will have more interaction with other

broadcasters around the world, they will acquire more skills and learn how to handle content and how to create content. I also see a bit of challenge in terms of economic viability. People are doing it, it's really great, but why not more people should consider if it becomes a real economically viable thing? A radio station... in some countries you have one in every township, and within every township, you have different kind of radio stations, some are only catering to the rural populations, some are only focusing on agriculture, some are little bit more reaching to young people. So you have very specialized audience around. So that is one example of radio stations. I think I don't need to say anything on mobile phones, we know that where are we now and where we are heading to. I think Internet and other social media is also linked to this.

Interviewer: Do you think radio stations and mobile phones will converge?

Suleman Malik: They will benefit from each other. They will benefit a lot.

8.3.3 Geoffrey Goddard

Position: Editor-in-Charge (English) Mizzima Media Group

Date: 26 February 2014

Location: *Mizzima* office, Yangon

A. Use of digital media

Interviewer: How does the use of digital media help *Mizzima* pursue its mission/goals?

Geoffrey Goddard: It helps us to market our organization because we have English website and Myanmar website. We are a bit of a pioneer in terms of having apps so that you can access our websites, get more fans. So it's critical for us. Digital media is a significant part of our expansion plan. You have to be there to compete effectively. So we are planning to upgrade our websites, make them more effective.

Interviewer: Can you give some examples of how *Mizzima* uses digital media to pursue its mission and goals?

Geoffrey Goddard: No, I can't because I have not been with *Mizzima* long enough. But my guess would be in this age if you're in the media and you're not in digital media, you're

dead. So I would assume that the reason why *Mizzima* got into digital media is because there's an imperative to do so in terms of the country's future. (...) You need to go back a little bit to *Mizzima*'s roots to understand why *Mizzima* got into digital media. *Mizzima* is regarded as an exile media organization. After 1988, one group of people went to Chiang Mai [North of Thailand] and started *Irrawaddy*, one group of people went to New Delhi [India] and started *Mizzima*. The only way they could function as an information provider was through digital media because, obviously, if they're in New Delhi, printing newspaper is not going to be very helpful. So it has to be digital media. So the circumstances of *Mizzima*'s early development demanded that it embrace digital media.

Interviewer: What are digital media used for in *Mizzima*?

Geoffrey Goddard: Retrieve information. Monitor information. Post content. Trigger discussions in the community by having the users comment on posts. Marketing. We used to be donor-funded but we are now hundred percent commercial organization, we don't need to raise funds.

Interviewer: What is the advantage to *Mizzima* of using digital media?

Geoffrey Goddard: Projection. Projecting ourselves into the market. And the market has become an increasingly... – this is among the middle class, people who have access to Internet. This is a pretty digital media savvy society, I mean that percent, probably the 5% of the population but they're digital savvy. And Facebook has been very big here for a long, long time. And I could remember being impressed by stuff I was hearing after Thein Sein suspended the Dam Project [Myitsone hydropower dam in northern Kachin State] and my Myanmar friends – I was working at *The Myanmar Times* then – were telling me about the applause that Thein Sein was getting on Facebook. And people saying “Thein Sein is my hero. Thank you, Thein Sein”, stuff like that which was really quite surprising for me because people usually, especially people of this generation, they don't usually give praise to the government. So it was an interesting example of how digital media was used to praise the government. I know it's used to criticize the government but it rather struck me that Facebook was so big here and on a very wide range. There's also a downside to Facebook because that's where a lot of the hate speech occurs.

Interviewer: Have you felt if government sources care a lot about digital media, particularly social media?

Geoffrey Goddard: They care about it. For example, the deputy information minister, Ye Htut, and presidential spokesman, he has a Facebook page. I mean, they're savvy about this. They're using digital media, yes.

B. Case study for discourse analysis

Interviewer: On 20 May 2013 Thein Sein visited Barack Obama in Washington. What type of media do you recall collecting information/opinion about that specific event?

Geoffrey Goddard: I do not. At the time, I was working at *The Myanmar Times*. My responsibility was the world news pages. At *The Myanmar Times*, we then were subscribed to AFP. So most information I was getting from that meeting would have come through AFP except anything I would have read on Google News.

Interviewer: Regarding the previous question, would you consider that the existence of digital media made any difference in the way you collected information/opinion on that event?

Geoffrey Goddard: If it wasn't for digital media, we wouldn't have any information about that event b

C. Social change

Interviewer: How are digital media enhancing democratization / social change in Myanmar?

Geoffrey Goddard: Making more information available to people in the hope that they might be able to make informed decisions. As a journalist, I think diversity of opinion is a great thing, therefore I welcome members of the public having access to more sources of information and opinion to help them form an opinion about important issues. As long as they are among the privileged group that has access to the Internet.

Interviewer: What is the potential of digital media as a communication-for-social-change tool?

Geoffrey Goddard: That's a hard question. I guess you need to know what percentage of the people have access to the Internet to be able to answer that question. And then that leads to internal elites who are driving social change. And then there are questions about

positive and negative if it makes people more aware of incompetence or inefficiency of the government, it's a good thing. If it's spreading hate speech, it's a bad thing. And in Myanmar, it is spreading hate speech.

Interviewer: Would you say that most of them are doing so?

Geoffrey Goddard: No, no, no. I'm saying that's a very small part of it but there's an upside and a downside. The upside is giving people more access to information that information that before August 2012 the government would not have wanted people to have. So it's a good thing that inappropriate behaviour, inappropriate decisions are being exposed. The hate speech side of it, I think, is very disappointing.

Interviewer: What challenges may the digital media imply in the democratization of Myanmar?

Geoffrey Goddard: The challenge is the challenge that exists in any country: that debate is going to be reasonable, intelligent and tolerant. But if you get into the area about controlling the debate, you get into the area of censorship. And I am totally opposed to censorship. So it's a difficult question. I came here in 2001. Journalists in this country we worked under prepublication censorship from the 1960's until 12 August 2012. And it was a great day when prepublication censorship ended, a great day for Myanmar and a great day for the media in Myanmar. And I'd be very reluctant to go back to a situation where there was censorship. But I think perhaps in respect of hate speech, there needs to be censorship, there needs to be some kind of moderation.

Interviewer: On the media?

Geoffrey Goddard: Maybe self-regulation is the best solution, the preferred solution.

Interviewer: What events related to digital media have been important in Myanmar?

Geoffrey Goddard: For me one of the most important events involving digital media was the monks protest in 2007 which some people stupidly called the 'Saffron Revolution'. It was one of the first powerful examples where the government attempts to control story were a complete failure because people were just getting stuff out there on digital media. It was wonderful. Getting video on Facebook and wherever they could, just getting stuff out there on the Internet. I think, it was as shock for people in the government,

the military like to control everything. That was wonderful, the way that stuff just got out so quickly. There was a lot of control on Internet cafes then, that had always to be checked by the ministry. When I first came here, we weren't allowed to call them Internet cafes. When I was first working at *The Myanmar Times*, if you had an Internet cafe, you were not allowed to call it an 'Internet cafe'. You had to call it something else. I can't remember what it was. I mean, there was a time where we had to call 'private schools' educational institutions. And 'jails' were correctional facilities.

8.3.4 Ali Fowle

Position: Video journalist, *DVB Debate*

Date: 27 February 2014

Location: Hotel Traders, Yangon

A. Use of digital media

Interviewer: How does the use of digital media help (your organisation) pursue its mission/goals?

Ali Fowle: Facebook plays a huge part in spreading of the stories we do. For a long time in Myanmar, the *DVB* website was banned while Facebook was still available. Sharing stories on Facebook became a really key part of how we spread information. Also now that more people have smartphones and SIM cards are available, there's a lot of people who are accessing this kind of information on their phones, because they have a Facebook app or something, it becomes big. Digital media or social media, in terms of Facebook, is huge in Myanmar. *DVB Debate* specifically has a very clear agenda where we try to upload something on Facebook every single day, our Facebook account is attached to our Twitter account, so something goes on Twitter everyday by default. We really try to upload as much as possible every time. Every week we do a *DVB Debate* program. We always try to upload at least two or three photos. The videos with the news clip they will go up on social media. The Facebook gets a lot more hits than our website itself. It's really, really vital to the *DVB Debate* project and *DVB* itself. When I first started working with *DVB* five years ago, we didn't even have a Facebook account. Facebook wasn't as big then. Social media wasn't as big then. Also, it wasn't big here at all, because so few people had access. Even though now there's still not very much connectivity in the

country, and it's still prohibitively expensive to get a SIM card for most people and most people don't have access to Internet, there's a huge number that do, whereas five years ago, no one had SIM cards, they were thousands of dollars and Internet was so rare you could only do it in an Internet cafe and everyone was watching you. News would not be something people pursuing. A few people would maybe have a Facebook account, but it would be a secret Facebook account that they just use for sharing viral posts and so on. It wasn't used in the way it's being used today where I feel like it's a really vital part of news sharing in the country.

Interviewer: When did it change, when did Facebook turn big?

Ali Fowle: I'm not sure exactly, because the problem is that I worked in Thailand for a while where Facebook's been big for a long time and Burmese exiled media was big in Thailand then. I was working for *DVB* which was exiled in Norway and Thailand. *The Irrawaddy* was also still in Thailand. *Mizzima* had an office in Thailand. They were three of the biggest news organizations and they were all living in a country where it was big. I certainly saw for Burmese news, the presence on Facebook being big, before it's necessarily big inside the country. When I started to come in here which was February 2012, just after the *DVB* journalists were released, before that I was a little bit nervous about coming in. I remember I came in early February, *DVB* had 17 journalists in prison, and they were released on 30 January. I came in on the 1st of February. It really was just a couple of weeks later. I went into an 88 Generation event and two of the journalists had been imprisoned were there at the event, which was really exciting for me, because I've been part of the campaign for their release. One of them already had a smartphone and was taking photos and uploading them on Facebook. The day I came in to the country properly – because I'd been over the border a bunch of times, was the first time I came in here. I saw it being used. It was not being used in anywhere near as much as it is being used now, but it was from February 2012, I saw it. I remember being excited about that. I was making a film about media freedom and the changes, I had been following the campaign for demanding their freedom before all these journalists. I was filming them after their release. I made that a big part of my film because it was so interesting and to see that. It was not what I expected at all, because, I'd been outside the country talking about how impossible it was to get access to Internet and that no one can get to this and that. The guy actually that I'm thinking of he's one of *DVB* journalists. After his release, he hadn't had any direct contact with *DVB*, he was a little bit nervous because he had

been specifically imprisoned for his work for *DVB*, so he had that slight apprehension about contacting them. Even though I'd managed to contact him, he hadn't gone in a *DVB* office or anything at that point. So he hadn't really got back in touch with those guys at *DVB*, he didn't even have any equipment. He didn't have a camera. He didn't have a video camera. He was using the phone his mom had given him and just was uploading onto Facebook, because he didn't have another platform at that time. He was a journalist at heart, desperate to put news out.

Interviewer: All he needed was to create a Facebook account.

Ali Fowle: Most Burmese that I know at least have a couple of accounts. I think it's interesting – I'm sure Facebook has all these figures and stuff. It would be interesting to find out how many people in Burma have Facebook accounts, because the number of people that can access the Internet is still so small, but it must be much bigger, because I knew people with three or four accounts. Partly because a lot of them set up accounts before there was freedom of the press. They were nervous about it, so they setup a fake account. Now, they have a real account where they want to get rid of their friends with the previous one.

Interviewer: Can you give some examples of how *DVB Debate* uses digital media to pursue its missions and goals?

Ali Fowle: With *DVB Debate* for example specifically, it's a new program that we're trying to encourage people to watch, obviously, because, that's what you do in TV program. Also, the whole concept is new. This idea of debate is not something that exists here. We're trying to help people on some of them, because at the moment, some of the shows aren't that interesting, because people come on, even if we can get a good guest, they don't want to openly disagree with each other. The by-line is "Agree to disagree." We definitely use social media to encourage people to learn about the context and just encourage the culture of debate here. As they learn about the concept, because now the people can speak freely or to an extent anyway. It doesn't mean they are, because they're so unused to it. (...)

Interviewer: What is the response of the audience? Have you found any patterns in the way the audience reacts to the debate format?

Ali Fowle: We got a lot of ‘Likes’ and a lot of ‘Shares’ and a lot of ‘Views’. In terms of comments, obviously a lot of them are in Burmese so it’s not that easy for me to follow them. It’s amazing how unconstructive the comments are. Lots of the comments are to do with the aesthetic. There’s a lot of controversy on the fact that we have the setting – the studio we have the debate in is quite edgy and modern. It’s a little bit vintage and rustic looking, the decoration is not typically Myanmar in any way, and I think people expect – there’s a lot of quite ugly, clinical, new build condos – that’s the kind of places they would expect to have a smart TV program or a very clinical studio. This is a little bit – it’s supposed to be modern and interesting, even if it got a vintage look. It’s a western idea. People don’t really like that. There’s also platforms. We have people sitting up on the platform. There’s a lot of contrast here over the fact that women are sitting above the speakers and we can see feet above people’s heads. It’s obviously, hugely controversial here, because feet are seen as dirty. We got criticism from the T-shirt or of the shirts that the presenters wear. People think they should be wearing a longyi.

We got criticism – unfortunately, we got a huge amount of racism. We’ve had some debates on religion and religious tolerance. Even when it’s not about religious tolerance, last week we had a debate on the Constitution, which is such a huge topic at the moment. We had one guy from the National League for Democracy (NLD) – he’s a lawyer actually but he’s a part of the NLD’s Constitution Amendment Committee – and one guy from the 88 Generation. They both happen to be Muslim. It’s a complete coincidence. We didn’t invite them on because they were Muslim. The debate has nothing to do with that topic. We invited someone from the NLD and someone from the 88 Generation. They happen to be the guys that came. There was no more to it. Unfortunately, we had several comments saying, “Why have you got Bengalis on it?” Sadly, it’s a very large recurring theme here at the moment, especially on social media where people can have a form or an element of anonymity. Social media always encourages that kind of thing. We do see it a lot. Obviously more when we talk about – when we have a specific debate on religion. We had two debates – we had one state versus religion, we had one on religious tolerance, then we’ve had national identity and all of those the issue of religion comes to it. Even with the Constitution, it does come into it. Although, that wasn’t specifically where those principles – it comes up a lot, especially at the moment. It’s a topical issue. It’s a recurring theme. I’d like to say that we have people saying, “Great point”, or something like that.

Unfortunately, not at the moment. We do get people sharing it and people liking it. I assume they like what's being said.

Interviewer: What are digital media used for in *DVB Debate*?

Ali Fowle: Apart of retrieving and monitoring information, we use it to contact guests a lot, because people here don't have phone numbers or they have phone numbers, but they're difficult to access. The Internet in some ways is more reliable, there's a language barrier. If I'm trying to contact people, I use Facebook a lot. I really would struggle to do my job if I didn't. Sometimes I feel I procrastinate too much with it and I would like to stop it. I couldn't do my job without it. I use it for work all the time. For research, contacting people, looking at updates. It's very interesting to see people's opinions, because a lot of – even the ministries here don't have websites, but they have Facebook accounts. It's amazing how much information is just on social media here, because there are no web developers here or there are a very few. It's very difficult. Whereas Facebook is already up there. You just add your information to it and it's a ready-made website and everyone knows how to use it – everyone's using it anyway. So we use it for content, we also – our presenter now has a Facebook account – like a fan page professional account. Sometimes, I use that to contact people, because I have to sign in through that.

For the *DVB Debate* we also have a live show. We invite audience. With the debate, we create an event on Facebook and we say something quite often to encourage more people, like we would say, "We're going to give away a free T-shirt this week for the first ten people that say yes to the event. We use it for a lot of different things. Research, invitations, contacting people and inviting people to the event itself. Also monitoring other news. Personally, I check my Facebook – I try to check all the other news websites as much as possible. I always have an eye on Facebook. It seems like a more active research move to go and look at all the other websites. If I was researching specific subjects like the Constitution, I would go on to *The Myanmar Times* and *Mizzima* and such but when I have Facebook on constantly, I'm 'friend' of all of those different media, I have one eye on it all the time, so when a news story pops up, it's there.

Interviewer: Do you only monitor English versions of other digital media?

Ali Fowle: A lot of them have both. *DVB* have an English news Facebook page and the Burmese news Facebook page. The Burmese one is way more popular. I'm subscribed to

both. Sometimes if something comes up that causes a big splash from the Burmese page, it will still come on my feed, because somebody I ‘like’ would ‘like’ to them and I can then find the equivalent story on the English page as soon as it’s translated.

Interviewer: What type of digital media does *DVB Debate* use more frequently and what for?

Ali Fowle: A lot of online media. I look at news online every single day and the Burmese news online. Like I said, ministries and stuff don’t really have a good online presence. A lot of the websites when you check on them say “under construction” or they don’t have anything complete yet to date and say things. We don’t really use it for that. Perhaps, we use social media for that. There are a lot of NGOs and activists’ organizations that tend to have a big online presence. That’s quite a common thing for I suppose, a form of research, by contacting people through that. I used a lot more when I was in Thailand, working for the same organization, just because a lot of the Thai based NGOs and they are Burma NGOs, but they’re based on Thailand working with refugees or border issues or even with some of the education projects, they run themselves on Thailand or they just send people and resources inside. All of that stuff there, all are based on Thailand. They have a bigger web presence. It’s increasing here now. I don’t use it as much for these much stuff.

Interviewer: What about the government and the ‘Facebook Minister’?

Ali Fowle: Ye Htut, Deputy Minister of Information. People call him the ‘Facebook Minister. He’s got a huge media presence, especially on Facebook. Hence, the nickname. We actually invited him to come to the debate over Facebook. He hasn’t replied actually to my invitation, but I know he chats with our presenter quite a lot. He’s the Deputy Minister of Information so he’s involved in media and information, anyway. I suppose he’s interested in that kind of stuff and loves technology and is excited by social media. He’s a spokesperson to the President, so he is kind of the voice of the President when he goes on tour and stuff. He’ll update photos and information and is one of the best ways to find information about the President and what’s going on. None of the ministries have good websites. Some of them are getting – maybe the Ministry of Tourism has got a quite good one now, because it needs to. Some of them are just still completely non-existent. These guys don’t have email addresses. You still have to fax. When we ask and invite a minister to come on the show or to do an interview, you have to fax them in Nay Pyi Taw.

Then they complain that the faxes are difficult to read, because the connection is bad or it comes out blurry in the fax paper. They ask me to send it and it takes two weeks. I'm sure part of that is bureaucracy that's supposed to make it harder to get in touch. It's interesting to see at the same time, the Facebook Minister Ye Htut, who is from the Ministry of Information, being so responsive. He has interaction. People will comment, he will comment back.

Interviewer: Does he comment back?

Ali Fowle: Yes, sometimes.

Interviewer: Only in Burmese?

Ali Fowle: Only in Burmese, yes. I don't really see a lot of that back and forth. He's got thousands of followers and you know what, I tried to add him as a friend and the Facebook said that his friendship box was full. I met him. He's really charming and forward-thinking in a lot of ways. Also, very good at doing his job. It's very difficult when you meet someone who's completely charming and interesting and seems to have these modern ideas. I go, "Great." People love forward-thinking. But then... that's what he's specifically implied to do – to make you feel like that. I suppose, as a journalist, we're trying to be a bit sceptical, but I thought he was really charming.

Interviewer: What is the advantage to *DVB Debate* of using digital media?

Ali Fowle: According to the Broadcasting Law, which hasn't come out yet but eventually will, they're going to try and separate print media from TV media. The idea is to avoid creating this media moguls like the Rupert Murdoch of Burma, because the people who do TV are going to stick to TV and the people who do newspapers are going to stick to newspapers. *DVB* won't be able to setup a print news source. I feel the future is on the Internet. It's so much more easily shared. You put it up on the Internet and the people can share it with social media. They can read it on their phones. They can take it to all sorts of places. As people get more telephones here and more computers, it will become increasingly obvious how convenient that is. There are a lot of advantages. Even having a Twitter account and stuff like that. I've been personally contacted by foreign journalists over Twitter, because they may be seeing my by-line. They've seen my Twitter account and something I've posted. Then they've looked online to see what *DVB* is. They kind of realized – we got a lot of contact from other organizations. The connectivity is a huge

advantage. People go on one website and then they see related stories and all these clever, little links. You're on Facebook and they suggest another similar website. You follow them on Twitter and they suggest another similar account. It's a huge advantage. Especially at the moment, with all these new media organizations growing up. It immediately puts you in platform. *DVB* has a big audience, but a lot of people inside the country really don't know that much about it, because it was exiled for so long and it was difficult to access. Maybe the TV channel they know of, but they feel worried that if they watch it, they're going to get in trouble. And now it's got this online presence as well. We can still get messages out there. Images and videos, information without people having the TV. It just broadens our platform a lot and gives people a lot more options. As I said the youth, they don't – the young people here, don't watch it.

B. Case study for discourse analysis

Interviewer: On 20 May 2013 Thein Sein visited Barack Obama in Washington. What type of media do you recall collecting information/opinion about that specific event?

Ali Fowle: Now, I struggle to even recall the event in the first place. I've seen lots of photos of that kind of thing. Unfortunately, I'm rather confused, because also there was this meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi, Thein Sein and Obama in September in Yangon. I feel like I've seen photos of them together, presumably from that time, but I didn't – I don't remember why I didn't follow that more.

Interviewer: You remember seeing some pictures?

Ali Fowle: Yes.

Interviewer: Probably from what type of media?

Ali Fowle: Photographs on Facebook, that's basically what I would have seen for that. I don't remember pursuing that story. I suppose I followed the Burmese news all the time. I'm a journalist here, but there's a point where if there's something happening in another country, I can't personally report on it, because I'm a video journalist. It would be something I would have passively be interested in but wouldn't have pursued to an extent. I don't really remember a lot, but photos on Facebook. I follow half of my Burmese friends in Facebook journalist and follow all these news organizations. (...) It would be

photos from media and people sharing stuff. I find quite often – I follow a lot of news – Burmese news sources – it doesn't always come up in my news feed unless people share it and with big events like that, it's always shared by certain people, foreigners and Burmese people here. It's like "Oh, this is a significant event, let's all share it".

Interviewer: Would you consider that the existence of digital media made any difference in the way you collected information/opinion on that event?

Ali Fowle: Definitely. Personally, it's the kind of thing that I wouldn't necessarily follow that much. Digital media is really the only real way I access media. I read the news online and I share it on social media or I read it when it's shared on social media more likely than others and other couple of ways. I have a *DVB* application on my phone. I have *DVB* news and *Mizzima* application, so I can in the morning just download everything into my phone, then use it to browse while I'm in the taxi and stuff like that. I rarely pick up the newspaper, because there's nowhere near me that has English language newspapers. I don't watch TV, because I don't have a TV.

C. Social change

Interviewer: How are digital media enhancing democratization / social change in Myanmar?

Ali Fowle: I think one of the biggest problems in this country has been lack of transparency. More connectivity is always going to be a positive thing. As long as you are informed, you can make informed decisions. That's why it's all for democracy. Otherwise, how can you vote for something or how can you decide on something or have an opinion if you don't understand what you don't have information about it. From that point of view, it's been really, really important and vital. It is really important to see dialogue and have information in order to develop and idea of thinking democratically. A lot of people do not really know what 'democracy' means, but if we are talking about people participating in the country they can't do that unless they have access to information. There are a lot more journals available now, there's a lot more media, but digital media gives you the chance to compare things directly at the same moment. You don't have to buy ten different newspapers to get ten different opinions, you can see them all in one platform right there, and it shows that there is not absolute truth, which I think is a real thing. Beforehand there was the state media and now, having everything online

in one space gives you the chance to see that there is more than one way of looking at thing, and it is encouraging transparency, opinion and debate.

Interviewer: What is the potential of digital media as a communication-for-social – change tool?

Ali Fowle: Ye Htut, the ‘Facebook Minister’. I think that’s a great thing. It’s so far away from the way the other ministers do what they do. They would even do pre-prepared press conferences half the time, never hear their voice, never seen them. Former dictator Than Shwe would not like his face to be on TV for more than seconds at the time, because people would take the image and make satyr about him, so he rarely spoke in public. And now Ye Htut is updating his every movement, and telling people everything about what he is doing, every campaign they’re going. It is obviously PR and strategy, but no later negative consequences come from that, from a country where really people do not know about their leaders and do not get to interact with them, I think it will be a really positive thing, and it can go further, and it would be very good to encourage more of that because it is such an interesting time, people talk a lot about Burma sky-rocking to a technology standard because we are going from nothing at all, no communication, no telephones, to 4G, from a paper banking system to within a year and a half it is going to be mobile banking, with people going from not being able to afford mobile phones to getting their phones at the same time as they get their credit cards. And at the moment we are stuck in this weird bit where some ministers and some official organisations do not have an online presence at all and some of them are updating everything they do on Facebook, and it is a very weird situation, but I am hoping that the potential will be that there will be more information and perhaps even more than there would be in other countries, because it is such an ‘all or nothing’ feeling. Whereas in the UK there are ministers that are encouraged to tweet but still it is happening slowly and they do not really want to try it... I think here there is a potential from nothing at all to like ‘Well I’ve got Facebook, and I’m on it, I’m getting on it all time’ or if I’ve got an online presence or a blog or whatever it is that may have they’ll go from nothing to a lot. Which would be positive I think, because transparency is important, not just transparency in terms of newspapers and news organisations, but actually hearing directly from the voices, the people who are running the country, because at the moment people feel so far removed from them, they just have no idea.

Interviewer: What challenges may the digital media imply in the democratization of Myanmar?

Ali Fowle: Definitely connected to hate speech, spreading unreliable news, there is a lot of distrust for news organisations here, and part of that is because it is so difficult to verify stuff. Social media makes it very easy to spread a message or fact, or comment, or piece of information that is not necessarily true or has not been verified. You see it all the time with activists who use social media a lot, they will post a photo of something from a different country and label it with like “This is the Rohingya burning down a house or something like that”, you see also some misleading information that incites hatred, and obviously the largest scale is the religious violence, in which media is definitely used to spread that message and carve those negative messages into campaigns, and then to a smaller scale there are slightly incorrect facts that have not been verified and can spread very quickly and people can take a quote which is maybe incorrect and put their opinion on and it spreads a lot, and also general trolling, people are horrible to each other, there's cyber bullying, intimidation, that kind of thing, I suppose it is the same in every country. It's just so common here. I've discovered this great thing where you can take a photo and put it in search where it is at. I just try to do it as often as I can. If there's anything racist, then I search and so often, it's not from the source that they say. I have spent some time in Nepal, the birthplace of Buddhism and there are a lot of Buddha images there. There's a quite common image which also is quite common in Chinese Buddhism, where they have the Buddha meditating and he's been straddled by a naked woman. The idea was that he's still human, so he can be tempted but he's meditating. He's a man, not a God, right? He is still tempted by things as much as other people, but he is so zen, he's meditating so much and so at one with whatever he's supposed to be at one with that he's not distracted by this woman. It's a very common image and it's used in temples of Buddha. And that image got posted here, right in this country, where it's way of Buddhism is very, very strict and there's none of those kind of images. It'll be very shocking for Buddhists here, especially strict Buddhists here. They posted it around, “look at what the Muslims have done to try and insult our religion”. It's just all over the place and people really thought that, that was a thing. It's such an easy thing to disprove, but because it goes viral, like any – all you need to do is a tiny, little bit of research, but people aren't actively looking for this information. They're waiting for it to be thrown at them. That's what social media does. It throws information at you. It just pops up on your phone.

Pings out when you're not even looking at it. People are passing about news, but they're still being fed things that are possibly untrue. That's the real danger.

8.3.5 Nay Phone Latt

Position: MIDO Executive Director, blogger and ex-political prisoner

Date: 27 February 2014

Location: MIDO office, Yangon

A. Use of digital media

Interviewer: How does the use of digital media help MIDO pursue its mission/goals?

Nay Phone Latt: Actually, our organization is based upon the ICT (information and communication technology). And you know, digital media is essential for our organization but you know our country is just in the starting point to the developed countries so using digital media only is not enough, so we have to use other media. We have to depend on other media because the Internet penetration rate is very low and also the mobile penetration rate also is very low, so for the organization we have to use every media, not only the Internet media, but also the print media and other media. Yeah, but hopefully maybe within the next two days with the arrival of Telenor and Ooredoo I think that digital media will be the first priority for our organization.

Interviewer: Can you give some examples of how MIDO and you as a blogger use digital media to pursue its/yours mission and goals?

Nay Phone Latt: I was released from the prison at the end of 2012 and after that, I organized MIDO. Actually, the people already know our group as a blogger, but I don't want to use the name 'blogger' because I would like to focus on the ICT development so I changed the name to the 'MIDO'. At first, we held a press release and so many local media came to our press release... We announced we are forming the MIDO and what we are doing. So this kind of news spread around the country but not only the print media, but also on the social media. At that time, we also created our Facebook page and also our website and we distributed the news that we are giving the training about the ICT and computer business training, something like that. We distribute this news from every media we can use, you know, Facebook page, website and local media, we used every

media. So after that, the local people knew about our team and they contact us. If they need the training, they contact us and we make arrangement and we go there to have a training. So the media was very important for the starting time of our organization.

Interviewer: Why did you decide to use Facebook at the moment?

Nay Phone Latt: In 2007, blogging was very popular in our country and there were so many bloggers in Myanmar and also in the outside of Myanmar. They could create a blog for free and they could also use the Myanmar font in the blog (Myanmar language in the blog), so there were so many bloggers and the bloggers were very popular but when I was released from the prison in 2012, the Facebook was more popular than blog and most of the bloggers they shifted to the Facebook. Actually, there are so many social media and social network but I don't know why in our country Facebook is the most popular. To create the website and to use the blog is not enough because the nature of the blog and the Facebook is not the same and with the Facebook the way of spreading to other people is very high, so we cannot deny the Facebook, we have to use it.

Interviewer: Could you go deeper into the main difference between using Facebook and blogging?

Nay Phone Latt: You know if you have blog, you need the audience. The audience have to come to your blog every day, but for the Facebook, the interconnection with other Facebook users is very easy and it is user-friendly. It is most user-friendly because users are already in it. If you have 5,000 friends, you don't need to go to everyone's blog. Whenever they post on Facebook, their posts come to your door.

Interviewer: But then would you post the blog post on Facebook or would you post it straight on Facebook?

Nay Phone Latt: Actually, I would write the post straight on Facebook.

Interviewer: What are digital media used for in MIDO and by you as a blogger?

Nay Phone Latt: We use digital media to find and send information and then curriculum and send teaching aids. You know our organization is focused on giving the training so sometimes we need to send curriculum via Facebook, or Google, or something like that. We have to find out by using the Google search.

Interviewer: What about networking?

Nay Phone Latt: Actually now, in our first year, we didn't have to make networking with other organizations, but now, maybe next month [March, 2014], we have a project on the civil society, so we have to connect with so many members of the civil society within the same project. For this case, we have to use the Facebook. Whenever we want to make networking, the first thing is we have to do is to create a Facebook group, because most of the people are using Facebook, so it is very easy to communicate with each other. So first thing, we have to create a Facebook group and then sometimes we meet face to face but most of the time we cannot meet each other. So when we need to discuss something, we have to discuss in on the Facebook. Sometimes we also use Google Talk.

Interviewer: You mentioned that you are going to do a project with civil society. Can you explain a little bit of this project?

Nay Phone Latt: Under the regime of the military government we didn't have the freedom of expression but now the government is trying to allow free speech so now everybody can speak freely. With the free speech there are so many people who can speak in the Facebook and also in the local media and also on the street. Everybody has a say and there is so much hate speech...Within the hate speech, there are some 'dangerous speech'. If I say "I hate you", it is not so dangerous because that is between you and me, but sometimes they say "I want to kill you. I want to kill your family. I want to kill your relative." That kind of speech is dangerous for the society. So, we are trying to make a campaign⁵¹. It is called "Anti-dangerous speech". So we will spread the message that we don't speak dangerously and that we are not the cause of the violence, so we will do a sticker campaign and also a T-shirt campaign, and also a song campaign. We will record a song, and we'll distribute the CD. So for this campaign and project we unite so many civil society members which are interested in our project. So we have a meeting next month, on 9 March [2014]. We have a meeting with the civil society and we will start the campaign on 15 March [2014]. So for that kind of campaign and project, we have to use social media. We also have the social media campaign. We will distribute our slogan, our

⁵¹ Thein, T. T. (2014, 6 April). Nay Phone Latt leads campaign against hate speech. *DVB*. Retrieved 26 May 2014 from <https://www.dvb.no/news/nay-phone-latt-leads-campaign-against-hate-speech-burma-myanmar/39355>

message in the social media and we will take a photo of the celebrities who are holding our message and we will distribute that kind of photo in social media.

Interviewer: What is the advantage to MIDO/you as a blogger of using digital media?

Nay Phone Latt: In our country, in our educational system, there is no curriculum for the ICT and technology. So, most of the people who want to use the technology, they have to learn by themselves, not in the educational system. The educational system cannot train them for the ICT. So, they have to learn by themselves in an outside place. If you can use the technology, if you can use the Internet, there are so many things in the Internet that can support your education. You can study so many things in the Internet. So, Internet and technology is very important for educational progress. In Africa, there is one project ‘One child, one laptop’. But, in our country, we do have ‘One school, one laptop!’. But, there are all kind of problems. Not only the Internet, some old villages in remote areas do not even have electricity. So, I had one news that they are trying to create a solar laptop. That may be good because most of the villages, they don't have the electricity and the government cannot do anything about that. So, some of the villagers they have to solve their problem by themselves. Some villagers are using the hydropower, some are using the solar power, and some are using the generator. They have to solve their problem by themselves.

B. Case study for discourse analysis

Interviewer: On 20 May 2013 Thein Sein visited Barack Obama in Washington. What type of media do you recall collecting information/opinion about that specific event?

Nay Phone Latt: I got so many news from Facebook. I have 5,000 friends in my account and every three or four months, I update my friend's list to add some active and reliable friends to my friend's list. Every three months I check my friend's list and I upgrade them. Most of the friends in my friend's list are reliable and most are educated. I got so many ideas, so many news, so many documents from them at the same time. I found also many new pages, news feeds, and I like this page so the news from that kind of page come in to my wall, so most of the news I got from Facebook. And, another thing is I'm writing a weekly article about the Facebook in a local journal. I write about Facebook for this

journal every week, so I have to check Facebook almost every day. The problem is that the nature of social media – I mean Facebook – and the nature of the print media are not the same. If we want to rely on Facebook, we have to understand the nature of Facebook. On Facebook, everybody writes whatever they want even if they are journalists or they are not. Plus there is not an editor on Facebook, so you cannot believe whatever you read. Whenever I read the news on Facebook, I always check is it true or false, or is it right or wrong. I always check these things. In our country most of the people use Facebook but they don't care, they don't know about this nature and they believe whatever they want. Moreover, they don't know about the technology. On Facebook, with the technology, you can publish a fake photo very easily and you can... if you are some Photoshop specialist, you can create a fake photo. So, we have to take care so much on Facebook.

Interviewer: Regarding the previous question, would you consider that the existence of digital media made any difference in the way you collected information/opinion on that event?

Nay Phone Latt: Yes, it made a big change. You know, every... I learned about so many countries in their transition period, I think the information technology feels the very, very first to change... When I arrived to Uganda in Africa, their technology is very fast. In every place of Uganda you can see the telecom companies sign board and everybody can use mobile phone and also in the Philippines, also in Thailand. The telecom set is the very first to change. So hopefully maybe also in our country we can see so many changes within one or two years and these can affect the society very much. But, the effect and the impact is not only in the good side but also in the bad side. Do you know the conflict between the religious conflicts? That kind of conflict is the old way of the military governments. The military government creates that kind of conflict in the past. They wanted to shift the people's interest towards a certain direction, so they use that kind of conflict. That is the old way of the military government in the past, but now they call on the technology and we call on the social media. With these new ways to spread content around, not only around the country but also around the world, issues are made bigger and bigger. Sometimes the people who want incite the violence, they print all the photo on the social media and sometimes they download the video file from the YouTube and they spread a paper in a very, very remote areas in the village. But, they don't know about the social media and digital media. They believe whatever they see. And, this began so

many conflicts. So, that's the impact of the social media and digital media. There are so many "impact" effects.

Interviewer: Do you think that with the new technologies and digital media this type of content has gone beyond even the control of the government?

Nay Phone Latt: Yes, but there are some groups in the military government who are doing that kind of inside-man intentionally. They have some groups and they do that kind of thing intentionally. They are using the social media and they try to make inside man, defamation, so many things.

C. Social change

Interviewer: How are digital media enhancing democratization / social change in Myanmar?

Nay Phone Latt: Around 2005 or 2006, the digital media were not so free. The military government put so many restrictions on the digital media that if you wanted to open a cyber cafe, it was very difficult to get a license, and there were so many regulation for the cyber cafes and also for the use of Internet, that was very expensive. So, it was very difficult to run Internet cafe and the mobile phone was also very expensive, and most of the new websites and also Gmail and GTalk and so many websites were banned by the government. And that is the time of the military regime. In 2006 or 2007, there was a new technology, the blog. Before blogger.com introduced the blog technology, most of the people we could only create a website, and to create a website was expensive, but for the blog you didn't need to pay anything. In 2006, there were so many Myanmar bloggers and they wrote on the Internet. They created a blog and there were so many blog addicts. This way the blogger could take a big role in the 2007 'Saffron Revolution'. That was the first digital media of our country. In 1988 we had an uprising, and in 2007 we had the 'Saffron Revolution'. You can compare these two uprisings and see that media wise and in terms of how the news spread to the outside world, the world doesn't know much about the 1988, but they know about the 2007 uprising. That is due to the help of digital media and also due to the help of bloggers. At that time, there were so many Myanmar bloggers and there were so many who were interested in the technology. Everybody had a mobile phone, digital camera and also they could post these photos on the blog or via email. So, 2007 is a big change in our country and we got so many support from the technical side.

That is why after 2007, there were so many politicians arrested and they used the Electronic Transactions Law to sentence the politician, to sentence them to so many years in prison. So they were afraid of the bloggers and new technology. When I was in a prison, I could connect with my friends around the world by means of social media.

Interviewer: From prison?

Nay Phone Latt: By my parents, not by myself. My parents came to visit me. My parents met me every month and if I wanted to say something to the world, I would say it to my mother, I would say to my father and they would spread my word to the world through my blog and other media, but mostly the blog. It was from 2008 to 2012. I started blogging in 2007 and I was arrested in 2008, but my friends saved my blog and they also created another blog for me. It's called freenpl.blogspot.com nayphonelatt.blogspot.com. Some of my friends around the world, if they wanted to something important for me, they would post in this blog. And if I wanted to say something to them and I wanted to write some letters to them, I would also post in this blog.

Interviewer: What is the potential of digital media as a communication-for-social - change tool?

Nay Phone Latt: I hope it will be for the better. There are two new telecom companies [Ooredoo and Telenor], they will start their service in the next two or three months, and at that time I think we will get mobile phones very cheap and also we will be able to use the Internet in our mobile phones, so the Internet and mobile penetration rate will surely increase. Internet penetration rate is only 5 percent, mobile is 10 percent, and the percentage will surely increase, but the problem is the law. The Electronic Transactions Law that sentenced me is still in force. They already reduced the punishment and penalty, at first it was minimum seven years and maximum fifteen years, but now it is minimum five years and maximum seven years. However, they just reduced this penalty but they haven't made amends in other articles. So, the Electronic Transactions Law can be the obstacle for the next improvement, and we also have the Telecommunications Law. In the Telecommunications Law, there are so many things... we need to point out. In some article the military of communication and information technology relates to the price. If the telecom company wants to reduce the price, they cannot reduce the price unless the ministry allows for it, so they can interfere the competitive and free market. There are so

many things we need to point out in the Telecommunication Laws. This law can be the obstacle.

Interviewer: What challenges may the digital media imply in the democratization of Myanmar?

Nay Phone Latt: There are so many challenges. The law can be a challenge. The policy can be a challenge and also the responsible nature of the user. Some of the users they use ICT as a tool to create violence or to ignite violence. Some of the people choose the ICT to spread the hate speech, to spread the dangerous speech. I realized that in democracy, you have the right to get your basic rights and you also have to take the responsibility. Your action and your speech cannot hurt any other people. That kind of nature is not so popular in our country. Once, General Aung San said that when we got the independence from the British, he said that you cannot do everything if you got the freedom and if you got the independence. So, we also have to set that kind of thing to everybody. Some of the people they misuse their freedom and also the ICT. So, we have to check and balance those kind of things. I don't like to control... I do not like to be controlled by the group or not controlled by the people, but we have to make some ethical steps in our society, we have to work that kind of ethic in the society. The democratic culture, the democratic practices, are very, very new for our people. Everybody said that we wanted democracy but they don't really know about democracy. The solution is in the educational system, and that is why we ought to create some curriculum about democracy, democratic parties, culture and also ICT. We have to include those subjects in the educational system. See, when I arrived in New York, I met some and family and there was a six or seven years old. At that time there was an election campaign with Obama and Rooney competing, and they were debating each other. I asked the child who would he like and he went "Obama". I asked why and he explained so many things... What is a democratic party, what is conservative party, why he liked Obama, why he doesn't like Rooney? He could explain so many things to me because the education system can teach them what politics are. By contrast, when you see somebody in our country, not a child but an adult, and ask them why do they vote for the NLD (National League for Democracy)? What do you think they will say? "I like Aung San Suu Kyi, which is why I vote the NLD". Why you like NLD? "She is the daughter of a general", they will say. They don't know about politics. They don't know about the basic knowledge about politics. There's an education problem, and that is why we are trying to partner with some University and some High School and if

we have a chance we will go and we will give a lecture. We can also use games for children. There are so many types of games. We have to choose the type of the game. In our country, most of the people play *Dota* and *Counter-Strike*, and everybody wants to kill each other by playing these games! And then see movies like *Fast and Furious...* You have to set a limitation and the problem is who makes the limit? We don't like one of the people make the limit. We don't like that kind of situation but we have to create our limit.

8.3.6 Rita Nguyen

Position: Co-Founder & CEO at MySQUAR

Date: 4 March 2014

Location: MySQUAR office, Yangon

A. Use of digital media

Interviewer: How does the use of digital media help MySQUAR pursue its mission/goals?

Rita Nguyen: We're obviously one of the digital media outlets for the country now. How we use it? We used digital media specifically around recording and getting our mail out to some of the connected. But the connected in among right now are more of the elite. It's something that not all people can afford, a phone or a computer. Anyone who is able to afford either of those things has a little bit more money. So that being said, we only would use digital media then for accessing certain type of profile of people here. And those profile of people generally are the early adaptors so we like to use them to figure out what they're using their phone or to understand the mindset of the youth and then to recruit. Knowing that we're not getting the mindset of everyone in Myanmar because 99 percent of population is not online yet. So for the purposes of digital media, we use it. No question. We use it to just write our name and spread our message and our logo and our brand but we're also very cognisant of the fact that the message that we're getting back from people is a very, very select few and it's only 1 percent of the population.

Interviewer: Can you give some examples of how MySQUAR uses digital media to pursue its mission and goals?

Rita Nguyen: Facebook, for example. We use Facebook for our marketing efforts. We use Facebook to promote contest and promotions and competitions and stuff like that. We also do our own social platform that we use for contests and for engaging conversations and that is a part of what we do. We start conversations. So we have a team of influencers who don't work for us but they just really like being involved as well as staff here and they go out and they look for conversation starters, which I thought were political and actually we don't get along the political discussion but let's say, the new Samsung phone that comes out. So we have a topic around technology and so we'll post around that and start conversations around the new Samsung phone or around the new IOS build. If there's a new game, we'll talk about a new game, we'll talk about makeup, photography, things like

Interviewer: What type of digital media does MySQUAR use more frequently and what for?

Rita Nguyen: For corporate we use Facebook a lot. It's the one that everyone is on and if there's one thing that you learn as a digital marketer is you go where your people are. So use Facebook the most, predominantly that's the one we use. And it's fantastic right? It's all in one place and it's easy to access and it's great. We have a Twitter but we don't really use it for corporate purposes really. I used it personally. I used lines like Twitter for external purposes. I get all my news online especially in countries like Myanmar and Vietnam I do everything online. But you'd be foolish to do only online in a country where only 1 percent of the country is online.

Interviewer: What is the advantage to MySQUAR of using digital media?

Rita Nguyen: Using online is cost effective for one thing. It's much cheaper especially here in Myanmar where everything, marketing channels are so expensive. So digital is more cost-effective by a long, long way. You're also looking on medium that is very, very easy to track, to analyse, to assess. So if something is not working you can then easily change it and make it work. The danger is once it's online, it's online. So you can't really keep up with what you're doing but as a marketer, it's fantastic to use because it's very easy to amplify your message, to get it out there and it's so easy to track.

Interviewer: What is the target audience?

Rita Nguyen: We are mostly a youth brand and youth means anywhere from 18 to 35. We skew very slightly male like 55 or 45 and we are mostly in the city. So 70 percent in Yangon, 20 in Mandalay and 5 percent everywhere else.

Interviewer: You mentioned that you wanted to specifically avoid political content. What is the reason for that?

Rita Nguyen: Because we're a social entertainment platform, we're not a political one. We don't want to be a news channel. You would come on to MySQUAR and you want to have fun and you want to enjoy yourself, you want to meet people who like the same thing. Facebook is largely a news feed here in Myanmar and it does it very well. There's not point and there's no reason for us to try to insert ourselves into conversations that make no difference. I'm also a very, very good believer that the youth of this country care a lot more than we in the west read about Myanmar. We read a lot of the political stuff but the youth here, they have other stories that they want to tell and other stories they want to share and has nothing to do with the 88 Generation or some of the political stuff that's going on. Now it of course is part of their lives. There's no question about it but you probably been in Yangon long enough now to know that that is a day to day thing for them. That's a very western mentality of journalism, right? You live here and you know that people aren't sitting at tea shops talking about what's going on in the Katchin State. It doesn't happen. So we wanted to build a destination and a place for the kids to get online and find each other socialize and have fun and meet one another. It was a very different experience than what Facebook is to them.

B. Case study for discourse analysis

Interviewer: On 20 May 2013 Thein Sein visited Barack Obama in Washington. What type of media do you recall collecting information/opinion about that specific event?

Rita Nguyen: I get almost all of my Myanmar-Burma news from Twitter because I have all of these feeds and alerts. So I remember going to the President's Office of Myanmar because they always post news there because I wanted to see what they were saying as well. So I do remember going on there and reading what they were writing about that visit. (...) I did not visit the White House news. That being said, I'm sure that the news

that I got was from AP or something like that. But I do remember the first place I went to Thein Sein's website because I do tend to like to see what their take is.

Regarding the previous question, would you consider that the existence of digital media made any difference in the way you collected information/opinion on that event?

Rita Nguyen: I have argued that digital media always helps with the amplification. If we only relied on print, it would be very difficult especially as at Myanmar to get really a sense of what's going on because most of the print here is in the Myanmar language. So for me it would be very difficult to get news. I need broader views. Much of the stories that were coming about this Thein Sein visit were actually international. I feel that there was a huge amount of coverage of it here in the country. The coverage was, he's going to meet Obama but not anything with any of that other than that they were meeting. I was like, "What the hell is going on?" I don't care about their meeting. That's just a physical thing. What I want to know is what they're going to be talking about and I found that very difficult to find real coverage in country so I rely on digital for finding information like that.

C. Social change

Interviewer: How are digital media enhancing democratization / social change in Myanmar?

Rita Nguyen: I would have to say that it's really not yet. I think that social change or democratization needs to happen when there's more people online. This is not enough for to make much of an impact. So the people who are doing it and posting things online and using online, I applaud them absolutely. But until you can get more than 1 percent of the country online it's not enough and that's just all there is to it. It's going to change very quickly here so that's great to use social change but until that happens it doesn't really matter.

Interviewer: What would be the figures that would bring on change?

Rita Nguyen: The President's Office is saying 80 percent by 2017. I think we've got a good chance of mobile being in and around that 30 to 50 percent in about a year and a half or two years, around election time... That's a lot of people. So mobile devices not

necessarily translate to smart phone, I think that would mean having Internet or web, but there are ways that you can access or you can empower farmers with the future phone with digital and those are the type of things that will make a difference with social change. So we are building apps for the farmers and for women out in villages and stuff like that. Because that's going to make a difference in their lives but it's not an android app. Because we would be insane to build app for farmer. It was in one of the discussion last night because someone was saying how social media did a change in Myanmar. I was like let's just talk about social media for a second. We're not talking about Facebook or building a game. For me to build a game for a farmer is insane. But if I build an app that allows farmers to talk to each other and all of their neighbours and international experts and experts on the government to look for seeds, to look for micro financing, that becomes really powerful. That's digital, that's social change. It's also social media because it's social media but that's not Facebook, that's not MySQUAR. That's not a game. And that's where technology and social and digital are going to change the face of Myanmar and we really want to be a part of that. When we talk about the digital connective base, everyone always talks about that 1% of people on the Internet but we need to think about the 30 percent that are going to be on phone. It doesn't have to be an Android phone. That's one of the things that we often forget is that technology and Internet don't need to be an I Phone or a Samsung S5.

Interviewer: Can you develop a little bit on the apps MySQUAR is building for farmers?

Rita Nguyen: Sure. We are talking to many, many different organizations. A lot of what we want to focus on is getting youth employed. Because if there is a real problem that is employment here. In Myanmar in general. So other thing that I'm really big on is women's human rights and women development and things like that. Those two are sort of major problems, there's a couple of things that we're working on. On the getting the youth employed section, getting kids means educating them and giving them the right kind of training and then giving them the right opportunities to meet companies and stuff like that. So on that front we were working on internship program to connect people, kids to companies. We're working on some educational apps and we have partnership with the University of Illinois. They're going to send us tablets, we're going to put a bunch of educational apps in it and we're going to give them to a bunch of schools. There's a Canadian company that owns 40 schools and has built 40 schools in Myanmar, so we're

partnering with University of Illinois plus this organization to get education apps to these kids. And so under the umbrella of getting kids employed there are three main areas: Education, training and an internship program... Education means high school and stuff like that and there is that sort of training as they're coming out in the university and then there's an internship program that actually places them with companies. So those were the things that we were doing. Under the women umbrella, it kind of falls into this two; because anywhere where there is women's cue, as an example for the internship program, we want to do internship for girls in technology very specifically. So girls who are from outside of Yangon can come to Yangon, we will have house here that they can stay at while they interviewing and while they're looking for jobs and we can help place them with jobs and things like that here in the city. We also have a branch for women and technology that is already live. So we're doing things like that, anything that encourages women and technology is we will able to catch online.

Interviewer: All of this you do from MySQUAR?

Rita Nguyen: It's an arm of MySQUAR. When people of technology they always talked about Android in Yangon. Even in 2018 Android in Yangon is a small sign of what is going to happen in this country. We want to be connected with all of Myanmar then we need to start thinking about how those people are going to be accessible. It's not gonna be Android device plus play a mobile game. It's just not that. A company working on Myanmar... it would be crazy for us not to that. Even our technical team. When I'm trying to convince people to come and work for me part of the discussion is about how we get to make a huge difference in a country like Myanmar.

Interviewer: In this sense, what is the potential of digital media as a communication-for-social-change tool?

Rita Nguyen: I think it's huge. I think it enormous but I also think we need to be very careful that we're not just looking at Yangon and smart phones and Facebook. That would be one key thing here. So long as people move away from the fact that it's just Facebook, the technology and digital for social change potential is enormous.

Interviewer: What challenges may the digital media imply in the democratization of Myanmar?

Rita Nguyen: The challenges with digital in any country not just Myanmar is access. So it's one of those things that I get asked to a lot about Myanmar and I always say that for consumer technology, there are three major barriers to entry when we talk about digital. One is political, two is infrastructures, and three is cultural. The political situation has largely resolved so far. There's going to be some freedom of speech and there are sure some censorship that might still crop up but for the most part the political scene is largely solving itself. The infrastructure part is problematic. You and I both know that it's incredibly difficult to get online here. But Telenor and Ooredoo are putting \$17 billion into the country to solve for that and frankly they got a lot of money and they have a lot of experience so they know what they're doing. So infrastructure problem is going to solve itself as well which leaves the cultural problem. I think the biggest problem with getting people online is not around getting them a SIM card that's affordable. It's about giving them a reason to come online. People don't pay for Internet. They don't come online for the sake of coming online. They come because there's something they want to do or there's something they need to do. So in the case of a farmer, they're becoming digitally connected because it helps them with their crops and helps them understand when they should be planting or not planting. It helps them understand when there's going to be some disease or preventive measures or whatever it is. It's the same with youth. Youth come online because they want to play games and they want to meet people. Everyone's got their own motivation. It's not a cultural thing. It's not as easy as say, "Get everyone a cheap SIM card and a cheap phone and we're good to go." It is part of it but it is not the only answer. I think that's going to be the biggest challenge, the cultural part. If we don't know what these people want, yes, we can guess and everyone was guessing and everyone's putting up what they think is right but that action doesn't make it right. This is not a country that is going to be changed by a few foreigners who are in the market. It's going to be changed by the locals and until we can get them connected and telling us what's going on, we're only making guesses. I have fifteen years of experience doing this. I had a place where it's like we think this is going to work and we think that they're going to love this. Whether or not they do is they have to tell us that. I think that will be the biggest challenge and it's actually the most exciting part. It's the part that I'm trying to tackle. The MySQUAR mission is getting people connected and solving for the cultural piece; not for infrastructure and not for political. Our users don't use MySQUAR for political. It's a nice thing but part of it is the politician themselves are not on MySQUAR. So there's no real reason for the kids to get on MySQUAR to talk about the politics of it

all. They did talk about it. They do post news, articles, and they talk to each other about it, there's no question. But it's not hate feel, sometimes on Facebook it can be very strong and we don't have that problem because the politicians aren't on MySQUAR yet and that's probably a good thing honestly.

8.3.7 Phyo Ei Thwe

Position: Program Officer Scholar Institute

Date: 5 March 2014

Location: Scholar Institute office, Yangon

A. Use of digital media

Interviewer: How does the use of digital media help (your organisation) pursue its mission/goals?

Phyo Ei Thwe: We don't have any official website yet. We use Facebook to communicate with people, especially with our target audience. Before we set up our page in Facebook, just only a few people knew our organization. But right now we have set up our page, public page in Facebook, and, you know, many people started to know about our organization: "Where is the Scholar Institute?" We connect each other through Facebook.

Interviewer: What is the target audience?

Phyo Ei Thwe: We plan to reach to the students who have finished their examinations in Myanmar, also to donors who want to support money through our organization. (...) In our organization, we have individual donors and also some foreigner donors, from the U.S. [George Soros].

Interviewer: Can you give some examples of how Scholar Institute uses digital media to pursue its mission goal?

Phyo Ei Thwe: Right now Facebook is our tool.

Interviewer: What are digital media used for in Scholar Institute?

Phyo Ei Thwe: We use Facebook to update information on our activities. We let the audience know what we are doing at the moment, and what we did in the past, and what we plan to do in the future. Sometimes we also gather comments from users, and we reply to those relevant to our organisation. We also take some pictures and upload them to Facebook from our conversation classes. (...)

Interviewer: Do you use any Internet connected device for the training with farmers in the field?

Phyo Ei Thwe: We sometimes use computers, but we do not connect them with the Internet.

Interviewer: Is connectivity the reason why you do not connect to Internet in the rural areas?

Phyo Ei Thwe: Yes, because it is not good.

Interviewer: Was there good Internet access in the future, would you say it would improve trainings?

Phyo Ei Thwe: Sure, it would be much better if we could connect to the Internet.

Interviewer: What is the advantage to Scholar Institute of using digital media?

Phyo Ei Thwe: It is very quick to reach to people and send them messages.

Interviewer: Do the students of the Scholar Institute use your Facebook page as a place to talk, to start conversations?

Phyo Ei Thwe: I don't think people use our Facebook page as a place to keep conversations. They just try to check the updates of our scholar activity. Normally, we announce activities but users do not comment too much in this sense.

Interviewer: Any other content you remember posting on Facebook?

Phyo Ei Thwe: Training activities. We have schedule of activities and future activities that are planned, and we post them for motivation purposes. We also share relevant information to our users, like scholarship opportunities, that we post it in our Facebook page.

B: Case study for discourse analysis

Interviewer: On 20 May 2013 Thein Sein visited Barack Obama in Washington. What type of media do you recall collecting information/opinion about that specific event?

Phyo Ei Thwe: I used digital media, and accessed them with my mobile phone, because it's always with me.

Interviewer: If you didn't have digital media, would you have been able to get information from that specific event?

Phyo Ei Thwe: No.

C: Social change

Interviewer: How are digital media enhancing democratization / social change in Myanmar?

Phyo Ei Thwe: A few years ago, we could not access YouTube nor Facebook. Nowadays, we can use YouTube, Facebook, and other social network, plus mobile phones, tablets, Twitter, therefore we can know what is happening around here and also post information on what is happening around here.

Interviewer: What is the potential of digital media as a communication-for-social – change tool?

Phyo Ei Thwe: It's like a boom to be explored. I believe that in every situation, there is good and there is bad use potential. Somehow for Myanmar we see things differently to Western culture, and in this sense you'd rather try to imitate.

Interviewer: What would be good and what would be bad?

Phyo Ei Thwe: It is good that now we can know what is happening in the world, that we can learn about new technologies, and that we can upgrade our knowledge. It is bad the fact that digital media are very open and some views or some content is not appropriate to the teenagers, children... but hey watch.

Interviewer: Regarding hate speech, how do you think it should be addressed?

Phyo Ei Thwe: Some content should be censored.

Interviewer: What challenges may the digital media imply in the democratization of Myanmar?

Phyo Ei Thwe: We need to be make a better use of digital media through education. We need to give training about how to use it, and the devices to use them, like the iPad. But it is expensive and limited. I mean that the iPad is not for education, I guess. It is partially, but it is mostly entertainment.

8.4 BACKGROUND INTERVIEW

Htaike Htaike Aung

Position: MIDO Program Manager

Date: 28 February 2014

Location: MIDO office, Yangon

Interviewer: What does MIDO stand for?

Htaike Htaike Aung: MIDO stands for Myanmar ICT for Development Organization. We started in 2012, with a group of like-minded friends. We started as a self-help group and then we gave trainings, especially on digital literacy to promote in rural areas. Then after six months or so, we then organized ourselves more like an NGO. After that, the main focus area that we do first is capacity building. That consist of digital literacy trainings, social media for change trainings, citizen journalism trainings. The latest training that we had taken is on mobile communications and also digital security trainings for Human Rights defenders. That's our capacity building program. After that, we have the policy advocacy program. For the policy advocacy we had done events like the 'First Myanmar Internet Forum' last June [2013]. It's a multi stakeholder forum that civil societies, the media, the government, and NGOs come together and discuss on their roles and the importance of Internet freedom for our country. We also do policy advocacies in the telecom sector because Myanmar is now doing the telecom reform. So, the couple of things that they have started including the licensing, the regulations and the laws. We have submitted our recommendations on the telecommunication laws and regulations from the aspect of the civil society which make much more focus on human rights sites. That's the thing that's capacity building, Internet freedom and also policy advocacy.

Interviewer: Do you remember why did you decide to turn into an NGO?

Htaike Htaike Aung: It's because of – when we first started this we were just a couple of handful of friends, like six, seven, eight friends. At that time, many of the people were working their full time jobs and on the other hand, had the commitment for this middle activities and events. But then we would like to accelerate and do more trainings, do more advocacies, so that's why we started to become an NGO and then have full time staffs. It was a couple of months after our founding, so it's after around six or seven months.

Interviewer: What about funding?

Htaike Htaike Aung: At first we were self-funded and then individuals, donors gave us funding and then after that we worked with international donors like for example Internews and also with Freedom House. And also we'll be working with Telenor, from next month [March 2014] on.

Interviewer: Can you elaborate a little bit what do you actually do, what is the purpose, what type of capacity building for social media are you doing?

Htaike Htaike Aung: Social media for change program for Myanmar is due to the 2013 The Myanmar Computer Federation. Due to them, we have the Internet users of 9 percent in Myanmar but then it has escalated and skyrocketed because the mobile leaders come in and then people are using so much of the Internet knowingly and also unknowingly. Because, you know, when we went to rural areas we could see that people were using Facebook, but then we were saying, 'Hey, it's not so bad, you are using the Internet'. But then they would say "I'm not using Internet, I'm just using Facebook".

Interviewer: So they consider that Facebook is actually *the Internet*.

Htaike Htaike Aung: Yes. So, people are using this knowingly and unknowingly and also people are using this social media for different reasons, some for comments, some for fun and some even don't notice how they are using it. We conducted this social media for change program so that people can know and tackle social media to a cause. For example, they contribute to the civil societies, they motivate organizations, using this social media to promote their activities more.

Interviewer: What is the collaboration with Telenor about?

Htaike Htaike Aung: For Telenor, we will be a part of the corporate responsibility program. It's about building community information centers across the country. MIDO will be taking the role of identifying where this community information centers are located and choosing the right entrepreneur, training of the entrepreneur and also monitoring of the program.

Interviewer: Did the initiative come from Telenor?

Htaike Htaike Aung: Yes, it came from Telenor. It was part of the complement agreement from the licensing.

Interviewer: What is MIDO's relation with the government?

Htaike Htaike Aung: Previously, around 2006-2007 most of the founders of MIDO we belong to a group called the Myanmar Bloggers Society (MBS). It was quite a controversial group because our group made a big event called "We Blog, We Unite" at around August, 2007. It was a huge successful event. People came in. And then just a few days after our event the 'Saffron Revolution' began. During the 'Saffron Revolution', it was due to the journalist and also bloggers that all the news from inside the country went outside and then it happened until the government shut down the Internet, in September 2007. So, our group was the highlight, under the spotlight. Some of us were closely watched, including our colleague, Nay Phone Latt. He was also politically involved during the 'Saffron Revolution', apart from being a very active blogger, so he got arrested in 2008, January, I think. Our group belong to – our friends belong to MBS and later we came up with MIDO. It was under the spotlight because Nay was in prison but then we also gave recommendations of blogs to the government, including their cybercrime laws and also telecommunication laws. But then it's good because of our previous activities in the past people and the media paid more attention to our role in advocating for the change of law, so I think it is good coming from the bad.

Interviewer: What are the milestones in the recent Myanmar's digital media development?

Htaike Htaike Aung: If I had to select, the year 1999 would be the year when Internet was first introduced to mass public so people were allowed to connect using dial-up and also from very expensive Internet cyber cafes. That was around 1999 and 2000 and then at 2007, there was the 'Saffron Revolution', the Internet was shut down and that's when the great Internet censorship era begun. Then in August 2011, Internet censorship ceased. After 2012, it was when people could connect using the mobile radar and also mobile prices dropped very low. In 2013, we got 800.000 Facebook users and now we have one million users.

Interviewer: How did the Internet censorship operate?

Htaike Htaike Aung: We have a gateway that controls everything at Yangon and every local service provider (LSP) has to go through that gateway. That gateway is like a bottleneck so everything goes through there.

Interviewer: So whenever someone writes an email they can monitor on it.

Htaike Htaike Aung: Yes, it always passes that gateway. And yes, if they want to they can monitor every single email.

Interviewer: How did bloggers react to censorship between 2007 and 2011?

Htaike Htaike Aung: What happened during that time was many bloggers who were very active in blogging stopped writing because they can't access their blogs and the readers can't access their blogs, so bloggers lost motivation and so we lost a lot of good bloggers during that time. Also mostly exiled media were censored, like *DVB*, so people had to use bypass tools to access to them. But these tools are not accessible for very naive users.

Interviewer: You were not able to retrieve information from media from Myanmar?

Htaike Htaike Aung: We could. We were using bypass tools, but ordinary people couldn't.

Interviewer: Only a minority could.

Htaike Htaike Aung: Yes.

Interviewer: When you say that bloggers lost motivation you imply they applied self-censorship, since they could actually post content but they risked imprisonment?

Htaike Htaike Aung: Yes. And then, after 2011, Facebook became very popular.

Interviewer: Before or after censorship ceased?

Htaike Htaike Aung: A year after the censorship.

Interviewer: In other societies Facebook is seen mostly as an entertainment platform.

Htaike Htaike Aung: With 'selfies' posted... It is fascinating to see how Myanmar people are using Facebook in every possible way. So you can see small kids or youngsters using Facebook just to post selfies or to connect with all friends. You can see journalists

always on Facebook trying to expound the news. We can see activists campaigning on Facebook which is really helpful also, and we can see the Minister using the Facebook too, you know, sometimes talk his vision or sometimes just to sell himself. So, it's a lot. It's not just a tool that maybe Mark Zuckerberg had envisioned because in Facebook it says, 'To connect your friends and families'. It's much more than that for us.

Interviewer: It's not about what media do but what people do with media.

Htaike Htaike Aung: Yes. It brings many good things and also it causes many troubles also, of course, because hate speech is dangerous speech, everything is now – it's easy to share news and it's easy to comment on Facebook. It's just one click away, so one click away you can advocate. One click away you can spread hate speech knowingly and also unknowingly. It's very easy to do that for people are not aware of it because their lack of digital literacy and also media literacy. I think we need to find a way to tell people what is information and what is misinformation on Facebook.

Interviewer: Why do you think Twitter is not popular in Myanmar?

Htaike Htaike Aung: Well, Twitter, in my opinion, is best used when you are really connected and especially you're on the phone and you find things to instantly tweet. But for us, previously, we don't have mobile data. We just have to sit on the computer and use it and so instant tweeting for us is not possible. And also the language, because Twitter's format don't work with us. We can't say so much with 140 characters in our language.

Interviewer: What about the issue with the fonts?

Htaike Htaike Aung: In Myanmar we are in a very complicated kind of font code phase where the most popular font that we are using it is not fully Unicode so it's only accessible if you have something installed on your computer, unlike e.g. the Chinese font you can read anyhow. But for us, we should have something installed on, so laptops or mobile phones might be compatible or not compatible with that, it's depend on the type of apps or software. But since mostly for laptops it is compatible, people use laptops so it's much easier to use it on their laptop, but on phones it's more complicated. In Myanmar we have a group using the real Unicode form, and another one using the popular form. So whenever one website has to be built, people have to think: "Okay, do I want to make it standard? Then I shall use this." Or, "Do I want more people to see this? Then I should use that." Therefore we don't have a standard font.

